PS3 PlayStation 3 | PSP PlayStation Portable | PlayStation 2

PlayStation®

The Official Magazine

Issue 040 Holiday 2010

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 40 (Holiday 2010)

MOST REVIEWS EVER!
23 games rated

GIFT GUIDE 2010

BATMAN:

MASS EFFECT 2
Brilliant sci-fi epic hits PS3

CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS
Better than Modern Warfare

Zap! World exclusive hands-on!

inFamous 2

New city, new enemies, new powers!

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EVOLUTION

THE VIDEO GAME

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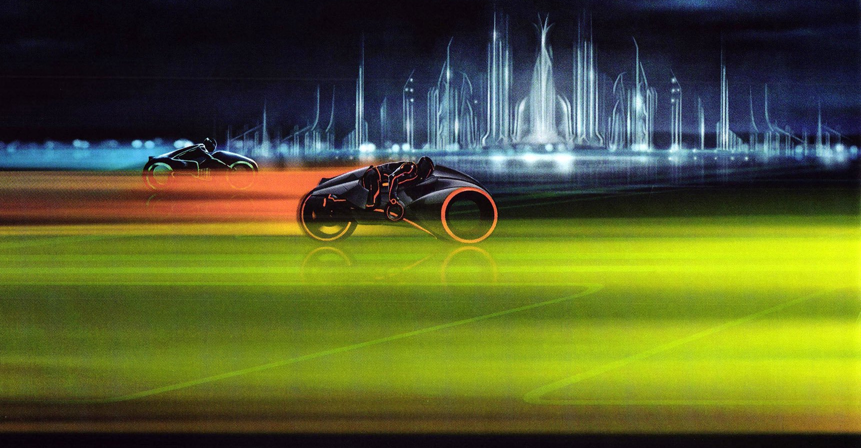

disney.com/tronvideogame

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Fantasy Violence
Mild Suggestive Themes

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XBOX 360
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Wii™
NINTENDO DS™
PC DVD ROM
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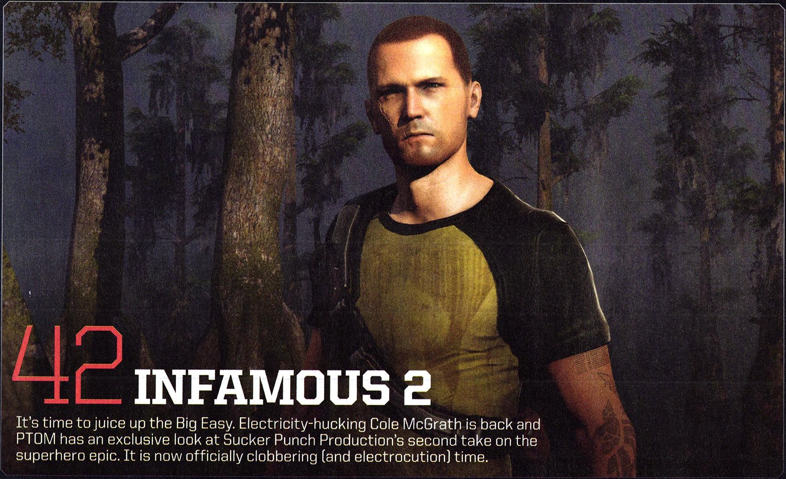
HOLIDAY 2010

COVER FEATURE



42 INFAMOUS 2

It's time to juice up the Big Easy. Electricity-hucking Cole McGrath is back and PTOM has an exclusive look at Sucker Punch Production's second take on the superhero epic. It is now officially clobbering (and electrocution) time.

ON THE COVER

PS3
PSP
PlayStation.2
PlayStation
The Official Magazine
MOST REVIEWS EVER!
GIFT GUIDE 2010
BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY
MASS EFFECT 2
CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS
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Lazarus Project
Cycle Presets
Facial Structure
Head
Eyes
Jaw
Mouth
Nose
Hair
Makeup
Confirm Selection
Facial Structure
Skin Tone
Complexion
Turn Head
Accept

Facial Reconstruction: Move left stick to select a feature. Press ⊗ to customize. Move right stick to view the face from different angles.

Code
931.1DG.WD8.F11.8CG.CA8.AQ9.71D.Q32.B17.287.676

52 MASS EFFECT 2

Finally, BioWare's brilliant sci-fi epic comes to PS3, and we've got the inside scoop.

58 GIMME, GIMME GIMME, GIMME!

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The only thing we have to fear is scary monsters, guys with guns, creepy cultists, and, oh yeah, robots shooting at us.

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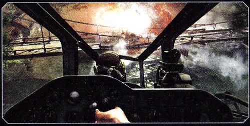
24 HOMEFRONT

War never changes. But sometimes it hits too close to home. THQ brings war to the United States with *Homefront*, a chilling first-person shooter from the pen of John Milius.



66 COD: BLACK OPS

How much more black could these operations be? The answer: None. None more black.

Cole Man

I'm not a merry old soul about the changes to Cole

Much has been made about Cole's makeovers. But, according to the team at Sucker Punch, it's much ado about nothing. The gameplay—they were quick to assure us in our recent visit to their secret lair—hasn't been altered. And the essence of Cole is intact; he's just been adjusted, thanks to the incessant clattering of the *inFamous* fanbase.

This whipsaw-like reaction can be seen two ways. The positive spin? Sucker Punch listens. They care about their audience, enough so that when they drew back the curtain on Cole 2.0, they suggested his new look was partly due to fan reaction (or make that the non-reaction) to their game's non-descript hero.

Then, when Sucker Punch's forums exploded and various gaming pundits had to hold onto their ears to keep their heads from popping off, the team decided to return to the original Cole—with a few alterations. (For details on the changes, flip ahead to p.42.)

Which brings me to the not-so-positive spin. First, to be clear, this isn't just a Sucker Punch problem; it's a challenge afflicing the entire games industry. In short: we've trained ourselves to think our opinion matters in each and every situation. We stamp our feet and insist everything go our way—or *else.*

That makes me nervous, because we risk robbing ourselves of something I love about games: being drawn into a new world. I want to surprised. I want to be moved. I want to *care.* But that often requires the hand of the creator to be dominant and for the vision to be as pure as possible.

For the record, I liked Cole 2.0. But having played some of *inFamous 2,* I also like Cole 1.5. This might be a case where the changes truly don't affect the overall experience—the game is spectacular so far. But it's something we should all be aware of when we demand a game company do *exactly* what we want.

GARY

Gary Steinman
Editor in Chief
@TinyManRages

Gary Steinman
Editor in Chief

Gary Steinman is a man with a plan. And as the plan requires a salad shooter, 84 tons of Fun-Dip candy, and the severed head of that annoying Slap Chop guy, one can only assume Gary Steinman is a man with one hell of a plan.

Ken Bousquet
Art Director

There's the right way, and then there's the Ken Bousquet way—which, if the scienticians' calculations are correct, is 31 percent more right than the right way. Plus, you know, it's just cooler. Way cooler.

Scott Butterworth
Assistant Editor

A gentleman's gentleman, Scott Butterworth only concerns himself with manly endeavors such as fisticuffs, eschewing dandies, and writing letters in support of the top hat. We should all be so civilized.

Greg Orlando
Executive Editor

Reports of Greg Orlando's tragic pancake-related death have not been exaggerated, greatly or at all. His cryptic last words, "Dishonor before boysenberry," have proven eminently forgettable.

Roger Burchill
Managing Editor

When the barbarians are at the gate, and the gate is under repair, and the repair shop has been closed since 2006, it's good to know Roger Burchill stopped using that shop in 2005. He's smart like that.

"Lewis" Anne Lewis
Intern

Some say it may be unfair, perhaps even cruel, to ask Intern Award-winning intern "Lewis" Anne Lewis to build the cannon she will be eventually shot out of. They're probably right on this one. Who knows?

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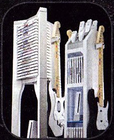

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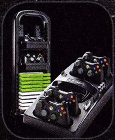
Ottoman Storage



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Inside Qore Episode 31

LBP2 means BYOG (Build Your Own Game)!

This month, we dive into *LittleBigPlanet 2*, a game stuffed so full of creativity that it's bursting at its Sackboy seams. This adorable platformer moves creation beyond individual levels; you can even build your own complete games for frolicking with Sackboys and -girls. Then, we lift off from the *'Planet* and into the galaxy with two standout sci-fi sequels, the tense *Dead Space 2* and the expansive *Mass Effect 2*. *Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit* brings us back to Earth, but an exotic-sports-car-take on cops-versus-robbers still feels out-of-this-world. **VERONICA BELMONT** HOST OF QORE

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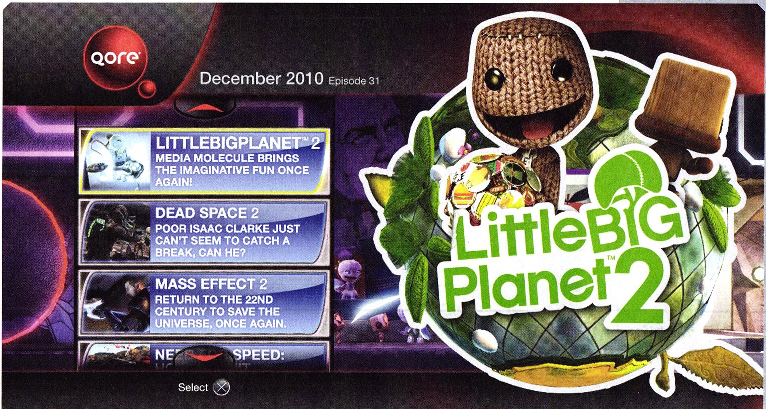


qore

December 2010 Episode 31

LITTLEBIGPLANET™ 2
MEDIA MOLECULE BRINGS THE IMAGINATIVE FUN ONCE AGAIN!

DEAD SPACE 2
POOR ISAAC CLARKE JUST CAN'T SEEM TO CATCH A BREAK, CAN HE?

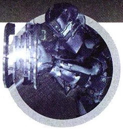
MASS EFFECT 2
RETURN TO THE 22ND CENTURY TO SAVE THE UNIVERSE, ONCE AGAIN.

NE SPEED:

Select ⓧ

LittleBigPlanet 2

Sackboys are back, and they're hiding lots of brand new tricks up their...sleeves? Do they have sleeves?

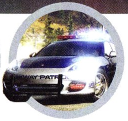


Dead Space 2

Zombies...in... space! The hideous necromorphs return with all-new reinforcements. Fight back the frightening horde overrunning an entire space station.

Mass Effect 2

As Commander Shepard, your choices can save the galaxy and possibly land you some alien love. Kirk would be jealous.



Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit

This open-world racer is anything but trivial. It's the law versus the outlaws in souped-up sports cars.

Upcoming Blu-ray and Games releases

Audrey has the hottest Blu-rays this month!

INCEPTION
Shrek

Qore is free to PlayStation Plus subscribers.

Individual episodes can be purchased for $2.99 and a 13-episode subscription can be purchased for $24.99. Qore subscribers have access to Betas, demos, themes, and additional downloadable content each month.

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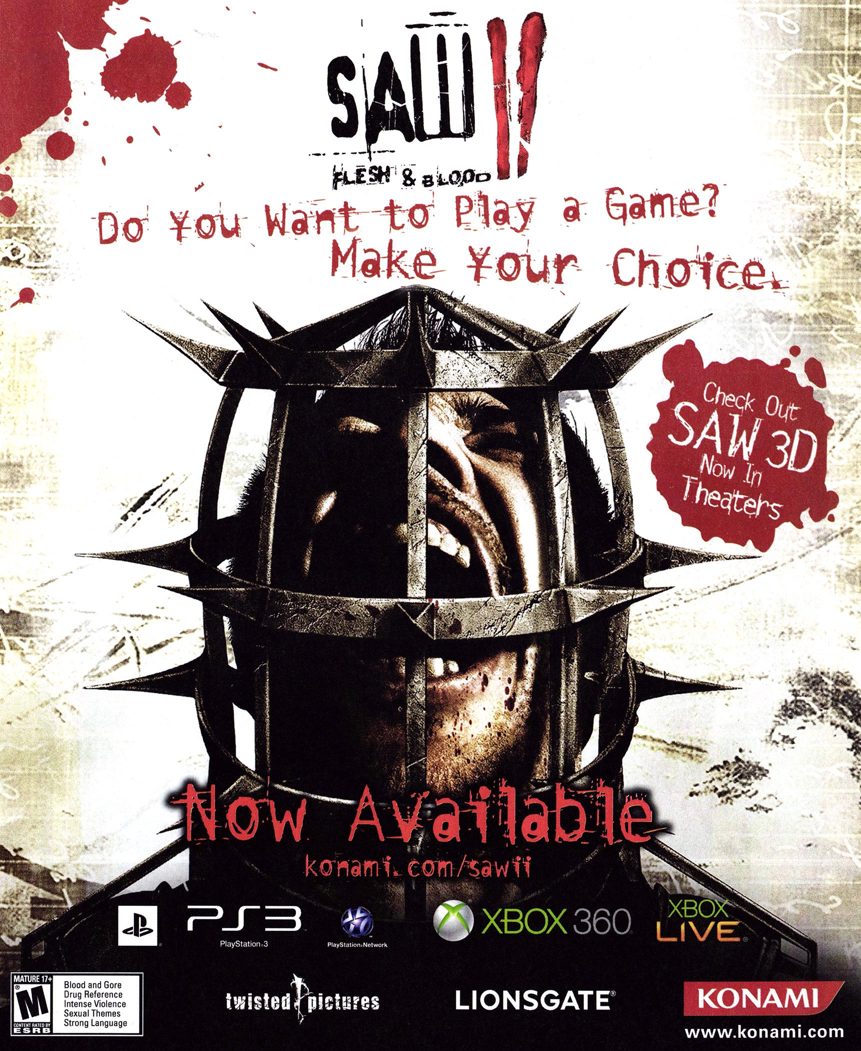
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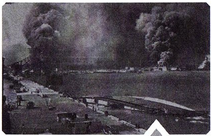
The PlayStation Entertainment Plan

Fill up your life with our monthly guide

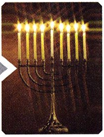
MONDAY **TUESDAY** **WEDNESDAY** **THURSDAY** **FRIDAY** **SATURDAY** **SUNDAY**



DEC. 01

First Day of Hanukkah

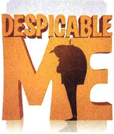
We made a little dreidel. We made it out of clay. And when it's dry and ready, dreidel we will play.



05

International Ninja Day

Tons of people celebrate this day every year! Unfortunately, we cannot see them.



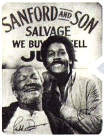
07

Attack on Pearl Harbor

Today we honor those lost during the attack on Pearl Harbor and the aftermath of the "day that will live in infamy."

--

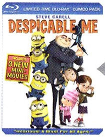
In stores: *Tron: Evolution*



09

National Sanford and Son Day

Or Redd Foxx's birthday. Either way we want everyone humming the *Sanford and Son* theme all day long.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14

Definitely Not Despicable

Despicable Me comes out on Blu-ray. Please, think of the children.

16

Chocolate-Covered Anything Day

Chocolate-covered anything, huh? We accept this challenge.

17

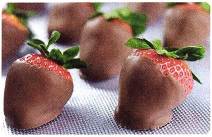
Sexy Quota Filled

TRON: Legacy comes out in theaters, but honestly, we just wanted a reason to stare at Olivia Wilde.

20

Total Eclipse of the...Moon

A total lunar eclipse is going to hit, so we may leave the safety of our bomb shelters to take a peek.



25

And to All a Good Night

Merry Christmas, all! Sadly, Santa will not be coming this year, and deep down inside, we all know why.

26

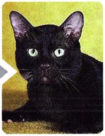
First Day of Kwanzaa

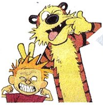
Kwanzaa begins today, so break out the kinara!

28

The Most Unlucky Day of the Year

We're glad we don't own mirrors, ladders, or cats. Unless you count the Black Cat statue in our room.





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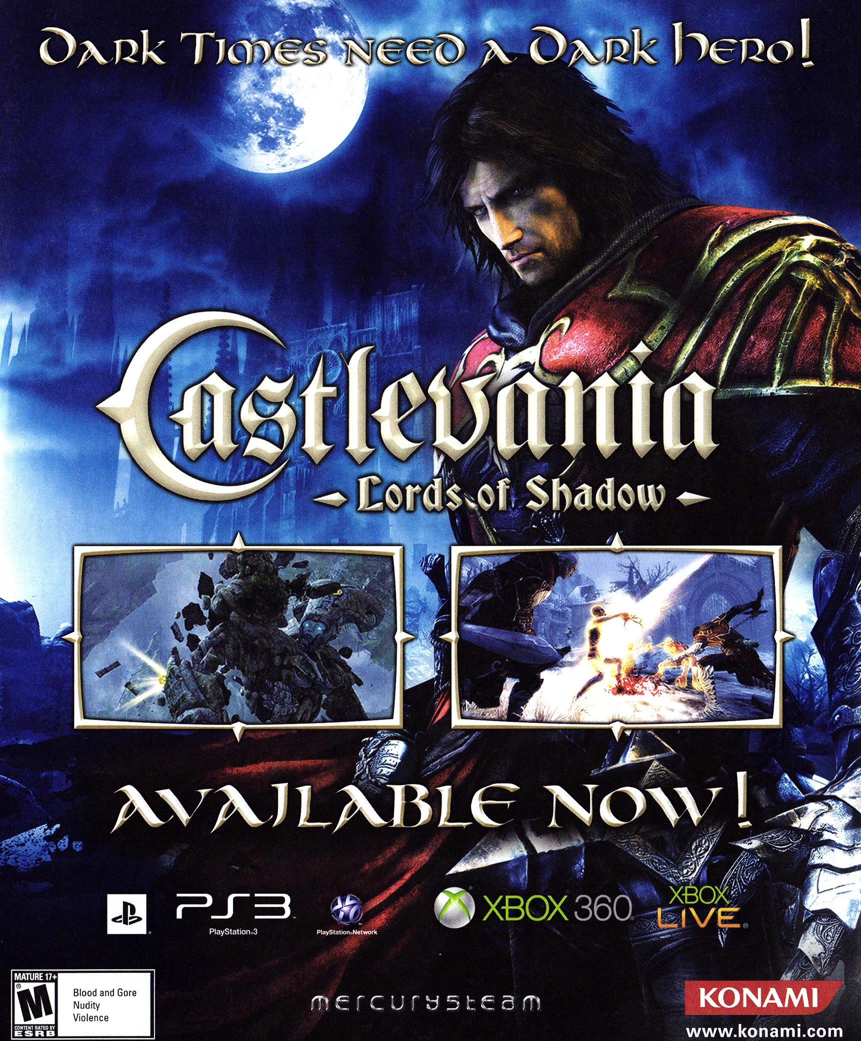
The Day the Transmogrifier died

On this sad day in 1995, cartoonist Bill Watterson retired his "Calvin and Hobbes" comic strip.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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

New Bat City
Rockesteady's Sefton Hill on the Dark Knight's return
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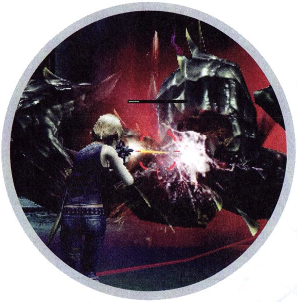
Chem Lab
They rock, they roll, and talk about Gran Turismo
»Page 16

Oddities Abound
Oddworld's Lorne Lanning revives his classic franchise
»Page 18

McWonderland
Curiouser and curiouser says Alice's American McGee
»Page 19

Broken Record
Apparently, what breaks in New Vegas stays in New Vegas
»Page 22



1 Piece of Cake

Aya Brea returns for The 3rd Birthday

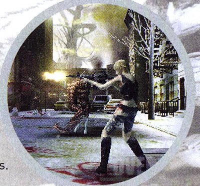
The party is over for Aya Brea. On the occasion of her third birth, she'll not be eating cake but rather engaging in wholesale monster slaughter.

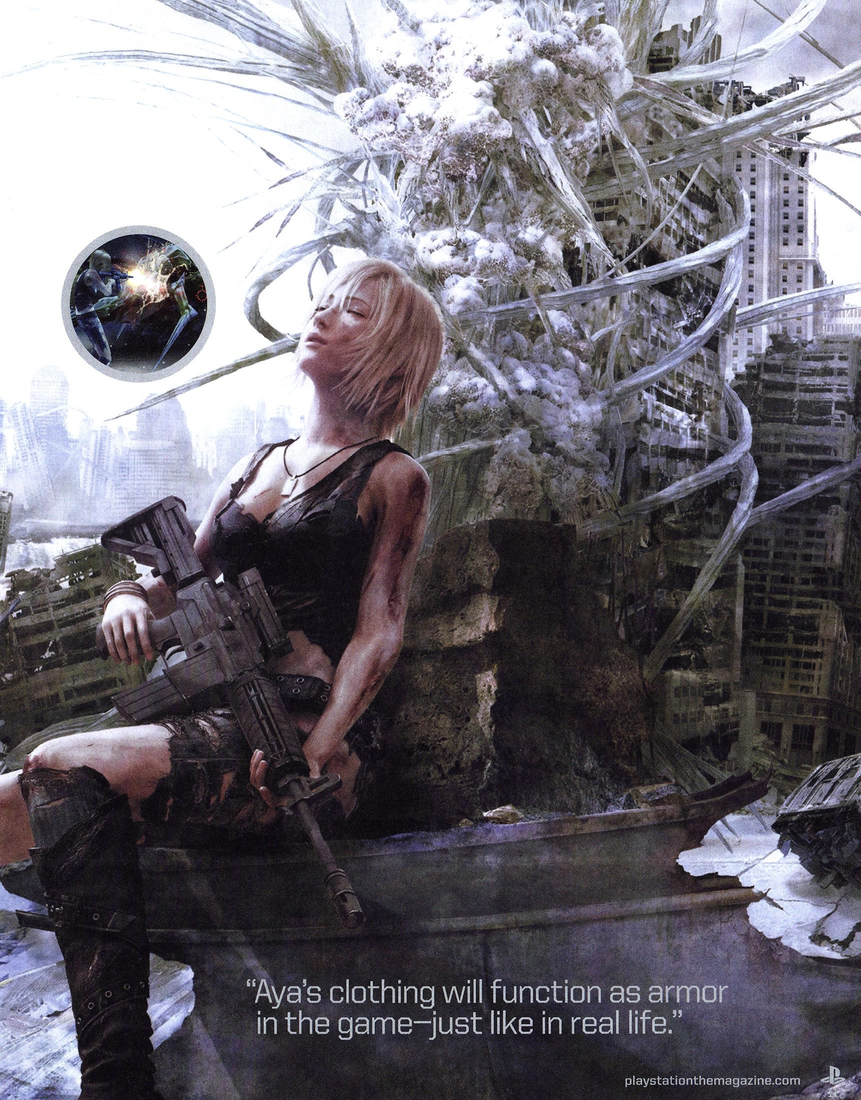
Brea, a rookie cop, last saw action in *Parasite Eve II* for the PlayStation 2. This time, she'll take to the PSP for Square Enix's *The 3rd Birthday,* an action-based role-playing game set in New York City in 2012 and releasing in North America early in 2011.

Birthday plays out as a third-person shooter, with Brea able to use her special "overdrive" powers to possess humans, jumping into and out of their bodies at will. Her enemies this time around are a horde of creepy-crawlies comprising the latest in a long line of New York's unwanted tourists.

We've heard hints suggesting this invasion will have some time-bending element to it, and there's reason to believe Brea will not only be celebrating her third birth (perhaps a reference to her third game appearance), but also her nuptials; one trailer for the game shows the heroine in her wedding dress, packing heat.

Brief glimpses of gameplay show Brea blasting her foes with a standard complement of pistols, rifles, and shotguns, and the developers suggest clothing will function as a basic armor system in the game. Just like in real life, long sleeves will guard against monster attacks. But only by so much...





"Aya's clothing will function as armor in the game—just like in real life."

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

2 Urban Legend

Rockstead's Sefton Hill gives us the keys to Arkham City

Sefton Hill
Game director at Rocksteady. In the past he's worked on *Urban Chaos* and, of course, *Batman: Arkham Asylum*.

Batman might have stopped Joker and restored order in *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, but his work is, typically, far from over. The Asylum has now taken over part of Gotham City itself, with the worst criminals in the world running riot. The perfect excuse, then, to slip into codpiece once again for more brawling, gadgets, detecting, and scaring thugs until they wet themselves. Welcome to the mean streets of *Batman*: *Arkham City*.

Do you see *Arkham City* as an evolution or a revolution of the first game?

There's definitely an evolution of story, but a revolution in terms of setting. It's important to us that players feel a sense of continuity between *Arkham Asylum* and *Arkham City*. The story follows the events of the first game and even explains some of the mysteries of the Asylum. The location, however, is about four or five times larger than Arkham Island, so we had to develop new technologies to realize such a big and detailed environment—something that would have been impossible without the experience of the original.

Other games have aped aspects of *Arkham Asylum*, particularly the FreeFlow combat system. What are you doing to stay one step ahead of the competition?

FreeFlow was one of the key features that really made players feel the power and dynamism of Batman's unique fighting style. As with every other mechanic in the game, we haven't just transferred the design from *Arkham Asylum*, we've reviewed all parts of it and developed them for the new world and cast of villains. The combat's been expanded and now has new features, including twice as many moves for the player to perform, the ability to counter multiple enemies at once, and the option to combo-in many of Batman's gadgets.

Have fan comments influenced the character roster?

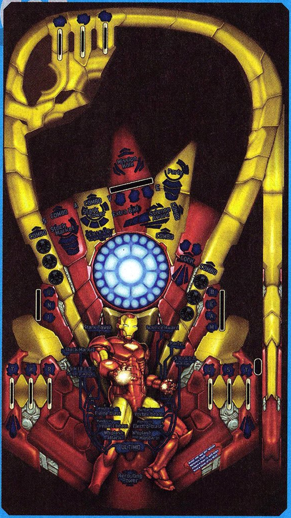
We're always taking note of feedback, and it's pretty clear that there are many serious Batman fans out there with very strong ideas about which characters should be making an appearance. Of course, it's impossible to please everybody, so our approach is to focus on making a great story and gameplay. We then choose the villains who'll help tell the

> "We had to develop new technologies to realize such a big environment."

tale and provide compelling and innovative moments for the player.

How have you refined the Detective mode?
As with nearly every area of the game, we're enhancing it. One example is the criminal database coupled with the new interrogation mechanic. The Riddler continues to taunt the Dark Knight with mind-bending puzzles and exploration challenges, but the location of his biggest secrets are known only to him and people he's told. Rather than unlocking their locations using maps, Batman will be able to scan a gang of thugs to find a potential informant. This is the guy you need to question, but first you'll have to take down all the other gang members while sparing the one you want to speak with. That can be tough when Batman's in a seamless FreeFlow combo chain.

Did you ever consider making the game more open world?
We don't want to define *Arkham City* as an open world or linear experience. While the backbone is still the strong main narrative, there'll also be many character-driven sub-plots to reward gamers who explore the streets. These optional side aspects will flesh out the story and show how many of Gotham's greatest villains have adapted to life inside a new facility. So, overall, there are elements of both a linear story and more open world adventure. I believe this combination will give the game a completely unique feel while remaining unmistakably authentic to Batman.



3 Table Heroes

Marvel and Zen team up

Forget pinball wizards. Fans of the silver ball have a new hero for their crazy flipper fingers.

Or make that *heroes,* as Zen Studios—the team behind our favorite series of pinball simulations—has just signed a deal with Marvel to create new tables based on Marvel's biggest stars. Releasing this December, *Marvel Pinball* will launch with four tables including Spider-Man, Wolverine, Blade, and Iron Man. Along with the standard features—leader-boards, online multiplayer, tilt, Trophies—these tables each have a story mode complete with unlockable missions.

As Zen has done with its other pinball releases, it plans to support *Marvel Pinball* with several waves of downloadable content. In fact, the studio wants to enlist *your* help in picking the next tables to be developed. Head to marvelpinball.com and vote in a poll to choose from Ghost Rider, Hulk, Fantastic Four, or Captain America.

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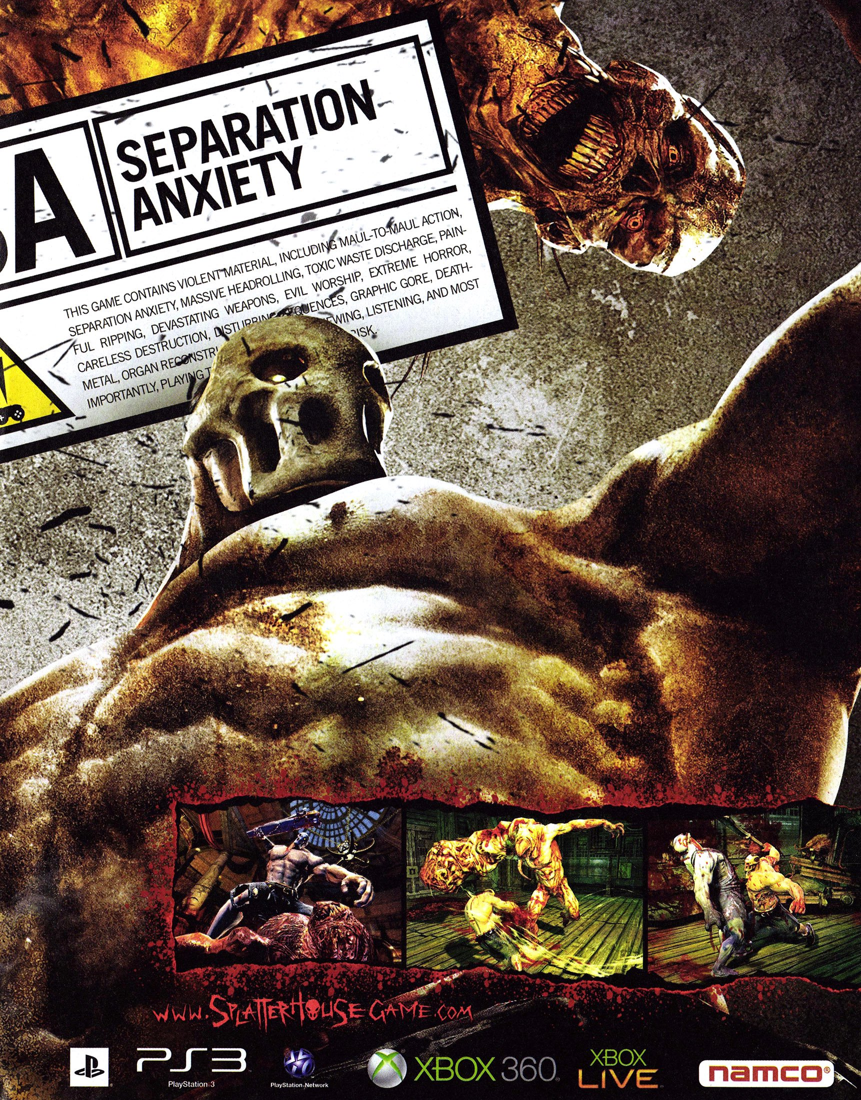

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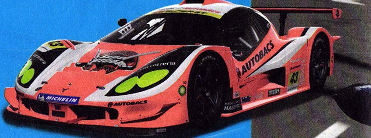


4

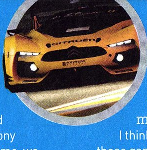
Road Trip

My Chemical Romance's Frank Iero talks Gran Turismo 5, Rock Band DLC, and Zeus' eyeballs

Meet the Band
Don't call 'em emo! New Jersey-based pop rock band My Chemical Romance has received plenty of attention for their theatrical concept albums, but not so much for their deeply nerdy roots. Their fourth studio album *Danger Days: The True Lives of the Fabulous Killjoys* hits stores November 22.

So do you want to talk a little bit about the new album? We've heard that it's going to be a little less theatrical, a little bit more back to rock 'n' roll...
Yeah, that was kind of the idea. It kind of took a turn down the middle, I would say. We decided first going into it that we were going to strip things down and keep it very bare bones and kind of get away from the concept record. But we ended up making a high concept record where it doesn't tell a story per se, but there is very much a concept and a story behind it.

One of the songs from that album—"Planetary (Go!)"—is going to be in *Gran Turismo 5*. Can you tell us a little bit about that song?
It's very much an experimental electronic song. It's one of those songs where in writing it, we went to listen back and really felt the power behind it, and it was like, "Wow, this is a song I want to get in my car and drive really fast to." So we did that. We burned it to a CD and got in our cars and drove incredibly fast and listened to it and it was amazing. And when we got approached by [Polyphony Digital] about doing a song for the game, we thought this would be the perfect song, and when they agreed, it was like, you actually *can* do that now and can do it in the comfort of your own home. So to me it's a match made in heaven.



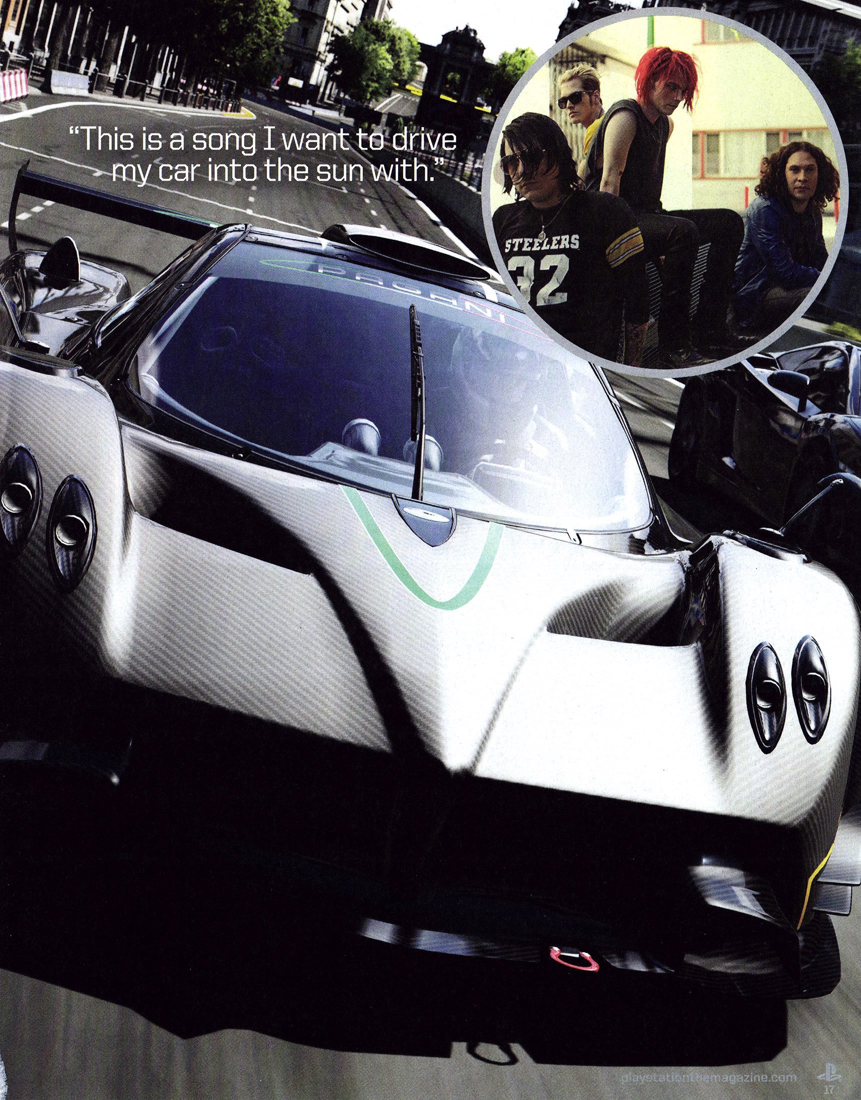
Sounds like it all worked out perfectly.
It's absolutely a dream come true. We had already been looking forward to this game as fans. So to now be asked to be a part of it, it's like, when the game comes out and you can get it and play it and a song that I wrote is in there... It's ridiculous.

So you guys are longtime fans of the franchise then?
Oh yeah. As far as playing games goes, that's been a favorite pastime for the entire band, especially on tour. We have two systems in the front and the back of the bus and a few random systems in the bunks. We're always playing when we're not onstage. We've always been a fan of racing games and especially *Gran Turismo*, just because it is the best.

What else do you normally play when you're on the road?
There's always a *Guitar Hero/Rock Band* tournament going on, *Madden* is always fun, and *FIFA World Cup*. I just got done playing *God of War III*, which I thought was incredible. Anything where you get to tear out Zeus' eyeballs is ridiculous. I love stuff like that. But I just finished that game and then my daughters were born so that kind of put a pause on my game playing so when I do get back on tour, I'll get the time to wind down and play some videogames.

A couple of My Chemical Romance songs recently came out as DLC for *Rock Band*. First of all, what took so long? Second, how do you guys feel about those games and your music being in those games?
I think it's great. Who wouldn't want to be in those games? It's a perfect match. It's a music-based game, and I believe it teaches finger dexterity and rhythmic picking, plus it's fun as hell. As far as what took so long? There are always these weird battles that go on between companies. It's so ridiculous, and all it really does is kind of anger the bands and confuse fans and ultimately it never pays off for anybody. So I'm so happy that bullsh–t is done. We love to play, and we like to be involved.

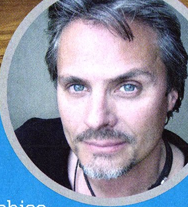
That's good to hear. You know there's that back and forth in the media. Some rock stars are like, "Those games are bullsh–t," but other people are really into it.
F–ck yeah! You kidding me?



PAGANI
STEELERS
32

“This is a song I want to drive my car into the sun with.”

GENERAL STORE
GENERAL STORE



5 Lorne Free

Oddworld's creator Lorne Lanning revives his classic franchise

The mysterious bounty hunter Stranger is coming to PlayStation 3, and not even a dosing of Novocaine can stop his creator Lorne Lanning from discussing it. Lanning, who has just returned from the dentist's chair, won't be deterred. He's formed a partnership with British game developer Just Add Water and the pair plans to release the quirky shooter *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath* on PSN next year. Numb tongue be damned.

Is it at all odd restarting the *Oddworld* franchise for next-generation consoles?

In terms of new product coming out, we haven't announced new titles and we're being careful to not make any announcements that may change. I think one of the things that happened was, the reception to the Abe games *[Oddworld: Abe's Exxoddus* and *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee]* going onto the PSN has been so strong that we said, "We've got to do this."

How do you see *Oddworld* as a whole?

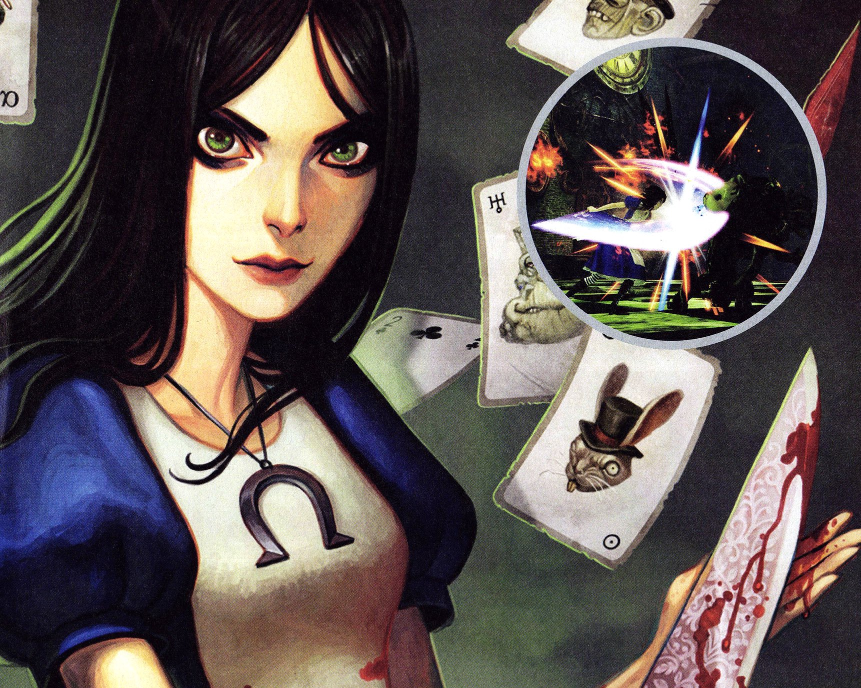
Well, I always saw it as sort of a cracked mirror, a broken reflection of our own world. So it was always really inspired by the dark side of globalization, which is interesting because now a lot of people are picking up on that. I remember when the games came out there were barely blogs or anything. In '97 people still weren't even on the Web and when they came out a lot of people were calling them anti-capitalist games, which is funny because today that's a compliment as opposed to an insult. But back then it was an insult and I was like, "You know, f–ck you guys. This is about the problems in your world and if you're a dumbass then you can just keep your head in the sand or why don't you start paying attention? Wake up a little." And so I wanted to wrap what was bothering me in the real world into these new modern narratives that would allow the audience to have fun at a very superficial level, but if they started getting more engaged in the content then it would be this sort of fractal of unfolding information and insight and it could lead you in all these different directions just by investigating "Why are these things called this? What is this connection between third-world exploitation and meat farming?" All these things are really sort of critical issues in our world today and we took them and added a big funny bone to it all. But that's the way I always describe it. It's like the Muppets meet the *X-Files*.

Tell us about the mysterious Stranger.

For people who are familiar with the *Oddworld* universe, it was always about characters that we handicapped in intense ways. These were not the guys you wanted to be, but they were more like the shmucks that you probably already are. It wasn't Kane and Lynch. It's not that type of "Let's go and be a super badass."

Part of the arrangement is more *Oddworld* games and, possibly, new *Oddworld* games?

We've been missing that sort of partnered development house that is going to care about the quality, really get the property, and really put their heart and soul into it. And so because of that we're really starting off with a few different things, some of them I can't talk about and some we've been in development for a while. The obvious ones are the conversions. I can't really say much more on what the new stuff is, but what I can say is that the trust that is building between the companies really facilitates more new titles than we would have previously considered.



6 Anyone for Tea?

The Hatter's not the only mad one in Alice: Madness Returns

American McGee must know it's our unbirthday: His return to Wonderland in *Alice: Madness Returns* is just the present we'd been hoping for. Retaining the gothic stylings of the original *American McGee's Alice*—a cult smash on PC in 2000—*Madness Returns* follows a mentally unbalanced Alice back down the rabbit hole to a Wonderland twisted by her own insanity.

Absence has made the Queen Of Hearts grow stronger, and Alice must fight her way through a dark and bizarre platform-based landscape to restore her broken little mind, vanquishing oversized teapots and other beasties to collect teeth as Sonic might horde rings.

Don't expect any multiplayer deathmatches or online play. McGee is focusing on single-player only. "We didn't want to dilute that experience by trying to wedge multiplayer in there," he says.

From what we've seen of the game in motion, the platforming seems solid and the camera smooth, with brilliant visual flourishes giving the game a real sense of character.

7

There's More to Life

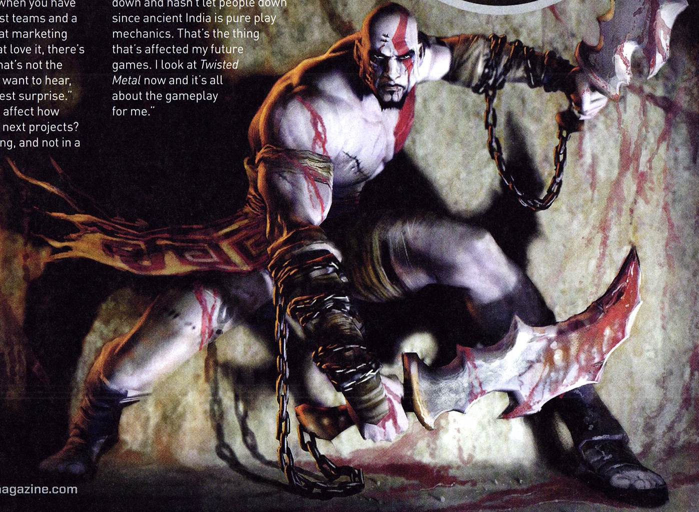
God of War director David Jaffe shares a valuable lesson

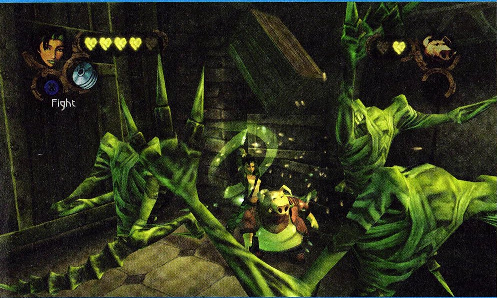
It was yet another brilliant moment of genuine candor from one of our favorite game designers. When asked during a recent chat what his biggest surprise was after completing the original *God of War*, David Jaffe offered this gem:

"It didn't make my life perfect. It didn't make me the happiest person in the world. I poured everything into that game and it was some lie I told myself: If I could just do this, if I could just stick it out, and it achieves what I have in my head... I dunno, I'll be happy? I'll be thrilled? I dunno. And it's not that I'm not a happy guy but, honestly, that was the biggest surprise—that even when you have one of the worlds' best teams and a great design and great marketing and you have fans that love it, there's more to life. I know that's not the answer your readers want to hear, but that was the biggest surprise."

Did this realization affect how Jaffe approached his next projects? "Yeah. I've been reeling, and not in a bad way, but sort of reacting to that revelation for the last five years. I jumped from one of the biggest games most teams had ever made at the time to one of the smallest *[Calling All Cars]*. And now I'm kinda back in the middle *[Twisted Metal]*.

This realization did give Jaffe one major insight that we expect will help his upcoming game. "I think the biggest thing it taught me was that gameplay really is king in this medium," Jaffe says. "I can talk and I can put emotion in games and characters, but at the end of the day, the thing that's pure and the thing that always works and will never let you down and hasn't let people down since ancient India is pure play mechanics. That's the thing that's affected my future games. I look at *Twisted Metal* now and it's all about the gameplay for me."





8

Beyond High Definition

Ubisoft's Beyond Good & Evil gets retrofitted for the HD generation

Finally, *Beyond Good & Evil* is coming to PS3—but it's not exactly what we've been waiting for. Neither a sequel nor a full remake, the beloved last-gen adventure game is getting an HD upgrade. But this won't be a quick-and-dirty cash-in: level texturing and character models are being improved, it will run at full 1080p, and the original score is being remixed. While no firm date has been set, the game will be released on PSN sometime in 2011.

Why's this such good news? Because the original *BG&E*, released in 2003 for PS2, was one of the finest adventure titles of its era. It was also, rather unfortunately, lost in the crowded holiday season into which it was released, and has thus been exceedingly underappreciated.

BG&E is played from the perspective of Jade, a young freelance photographer living on a planet caught in the grip of war. She was raised from birth by her half-pig half-human uncle Pey'j, and when we join her story she's looking after a group of war orphans at her home—in a lighthouse. It's all very odd, very French, and a very engaging experience from start to finish.

In 2008, Ubisoft announced creator Michel Ancel was working on a sequel. And while the announcement trailer looked fantastic, nothing has shown up in the two-plus years since. So play *BG&E* HD when it's released, not only to experience one of the truly superb adventure games of the modern era, but also to let Ubisoft know it's got an audience for its impending sequel.

9

The Readers' Most Wanted

In a world of big hits, the biggest hitters hold tight atop our list. *Black Ops* is the no-brainer—sure to be one of this holiday's top-sellers. Sony's delayed duo of *LittleBigPlanet 2* and *Gran Turismo 5* continue to captivate gamers' hearts. *Final Fantasy XIV* shrugs off the negative feedback from its PC release to crawl up two spots to number six. And *Mortal Kombat* proves it still packs a mighty punch.

01 ***Call of Duty: Black Ops***
02 ***Gran Turismo 5***
03 ***Mortal Kombat***
04 ***LittleBigPlanet 2***
05 ***Killzone 3***
06 ***Final Fantasy XIV***
07 ***Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood***
08 ***Twisted Metal***
09 ***Batman: Arkham City***
10 ***Fallout: New Vegas***
11 ***Rock Band 3***
12 ***SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs***
13 ***Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II***
14 ***Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit***
15 ***inFamous 2***
16 ***Marvel vs. Capcom 3***
17 ***Max Payne 3***
18 ***Dead Space 2***
19 ***The Sims 3***
20 ***DC Universe Online***

FINAL FANTASY XIV

GRAN TURISMO 5

Stats in this chart appear courtesy of OTX Research. All games are PS3 titles scheduled to release after September 23, 2010. Polling period was Sept. 12, 2010, to Oct. 17, 2010.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

10 Can a Buggy Game Still Be Great?

PTOM's finest has a falling out over some unfinished business

Yes

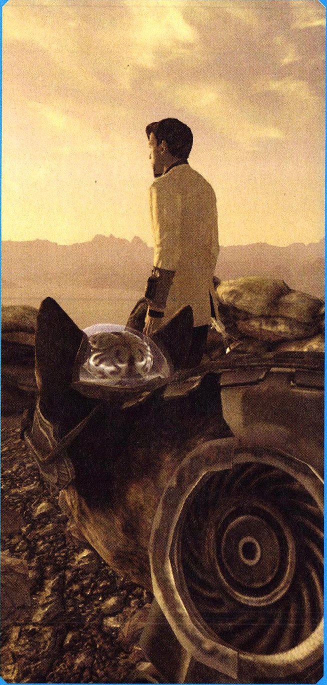
Says the only woman who will ever love you, warts and all

Anne Lewis

If your wife stuttered every once in a while and occasionally walked backward, you would still love her, right? True, *Fallout: New Vegas* has a few—let's call them kinks—that should have been worked out before the game hit the stores. But alas, they were not and now we have to, oh no, deal with them alongside a fantastic story and far better graphics than we saw in *Fallout 3*.

I understand very well the desire for a perfect game, but I also fully believe in allowing a great game some flaws. So what if the dog walks in place and there is a bit of lag? (Okay, *a lot* of lag.) I save frequently, so these glitches aren't game-breaking. Many of these bugs can be annoying, but personally I enjoy some of them. Here's hoping some of the funnier or more beneficial ones—like the infinite caps glitch we saw in *Fallout 3*—stick around.

For those who are severely peeved by the situation (Gary): We live in a world where developers listen to us every once in a while, and Bethesda is already working through the glitches people have been noticing with a rapid deployment of patches. Yes, it's not ideal, but in our modern age of ever-evolving downloadable content, isn't it better to start enjoying the game now, knowing those pesky glitches will get fixed lickety-split? So let us not weep over the bug perched on our otherwise delicious pie.



No

Says the last man in the Western world to have standards

Gary Steinman

When I pay for a car, I expect a working engine, doors that don't fall off, and all four wheels to be of the circular variety. When I buy a meal at a fine-dining establishment, I want my chicken fully cooked and my sushi suitably raw. And when I plunk down 739 rubles for a mail-order bride, yes, Anne, I expect her to speak clearly and walk properly.

Am I being difficult? Too picky? Perhaps. But it's *my* money and it's *my* time, and if I spend both of those precious (and in my case, limited) commodities on a piece of interactive entertainment, I expect to be interactively entertained. Is that too much to ask for?

I say, no. Now, I'm not arbitrary or cruel; I can empathize with a company's need to ship a product on time. A lot rests on hitting dates: retailers hold shelf space, investors hold stock. But I'm neither. Rather, I'm a customer, and as such, I'm always right. Which is why it's wrong to give me an unfinished product.

That's why I won't play *Fallout: New Vegas* on day one. I know it's a very good game with a very good story. And I'm sure many—if not all—of the bugs will be squashed in subsequent patches. So I'll bide my time and wait for those precious patches, thus saving myself some heartache—and perhaps even a few dollars off the release price.

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- ▸ Game Design
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- Internet Marketing
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- Music Production
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Previews

Quick Pitch

War!
Homefront offers a chilling scenario where a unified Korea takes over the United States.

Red Dawn
The story comes straight from the mind of *Red Dawn* writer John Milius.

Occupation
The game asks players to think about living in a brand-new America.

UPDATE Format **PS3** ETA **March 2011** Pub **THQ** Dev **Kaos Studios**

Homefront

War hits home

There will be no survivors battling mutants in an apocalyptic future, no ragtag band of space marines facing a vicious alien threat, and definitely not any army combatants on missions torn from today's headlines. Instead, *Homefront* offers something different from what most gamers are used to seeing in action games—a speculative fiction set just two decades into a frightening future that, while unlikely, could come to pass given the right geopolitical circumstances.

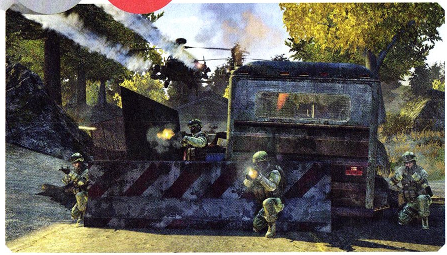
In *Homefront*, North Korea, under the leadership of Kim Jong-Un, first takes over most of Asia before setting its sights on America, pulling off a successful invasion with the aid of well-timed EMP bursts and an unexpected Trojan horse strategy. It's a harsh future imagined in part by writer/director John Milius, who has some experience with American invasions as one of the minds behind the 1984 film *Red Dawn*—a Cold War cult classic that imagined a Soviet invasion in our heartland.

Human League

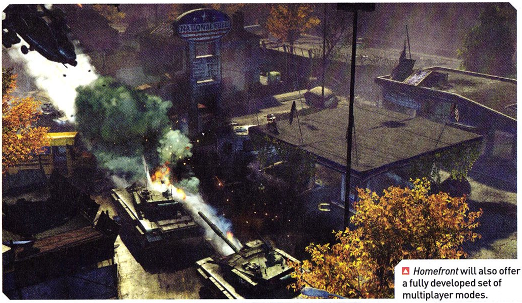
It's a novel idea, but one that was borne out of exhaustion. "I've been making FPS games for 10 years and I feel a lot of genre fatigue right now," says lead level designer Rex Dickson. "I feel like things fit into two categories—you have your modern military combat shooters and then you have your armored space guy versus aliens games, and almost nothing in between—everyone's trying to steal a piece of that market share. Forget about being a developer; as a gamer I want to see something new. Where is the new core fantasy? Where is the experience I haven't had yet?"

But it's not just the setting that attracted Dickson to this project. It's also his studio's ambition to show the human side of war—specifically, how it affects civilians. For Dickson, that means an unflinching focus on all the horrors that can affect a populace when war comes to the homefront, including the consequences of violence and the human reactions to that violence.

In the game's first level, the protagonist Robert Jacobs is viciously taken to a bus by armed Korean soldiers who are rounding up pilots. As the bus rolls through the town of Montrose, Colo., he's forced to watch a series of wartime atrocities: a lineup ▸▸



△ *Homefront* utilizes the Drama Engine, a toolset designed to put game events right in players' faces. Immediate threats will seem to center on the protagonist, Robert Jacobs.



△ *Homefront* will also offer a fully developed set of multiplayer modes.

of Americans in front of a firing squad, a couple mercilessly gunned down in front of their toddler. This sort of brutality is just the tip of the iceberg for *Homefront's* single-player campaign, Dickson explains. "We took elements of the worst humanitarian disasters in the history of this planet that came from warfare—things like the Stalingrad battle and the Warsaw ghetto uprising—horrible, horrible humanitarian disasters and we use them all in this game. We didn't constrain ourselves to say, 'This is too hardcore. We can't do X, Y, or Z because that's too far.' We took it that far. And I think it represents one of the most interesting points of the game."

"We took elements of the worst humanitarian disasters in history."

Why We Fight

The game's first sequence, tentatively titled "Why We Fight," continues when Jacobs is rescued by a freedom fighter who immediately pulls him into the struggle. As he cuts through suburban backyards, one of the game's early mantras becomes evident: The familiar becomes unfamiliar. It's a core tenet that's exemplified in the environmental art of the game. Streets once lined with bakeries and shops are now filled with soldiers. Children's toys are scavenged for more helpful uses, including energy generation—essential for survival since most of the underground forces are living off the grid.

Making his way through this suburban combat zone, Jacobs encounters other characters fighting the occupation and it becomes apparent not everyone in the movement shares the same viewpoint. One character is overly aggressive, believing civilian casualties are a fact of war. Another will opt to protect fellow citizens and preserve the American way of life. It's up to the player to decide where he stands. For Dickson, it all comes down to one big question: "Ultimately what we want people to ask themselves is, if God forbid this ever happened to me someday, some foreign army came rolling in with tanks, would I have the balls to pick up a weapon and fight back or would I just accept it and live under occupation?" **DAN DIGIACOMO**

Dev Chat

"The Drama Engine [Kaos Studios' programming tool] is a way of getting stuff in the player's face, and it ties back in to getting them engaged. Everything will magnetize toward the player—the idea being that the more something is coming at you, the more engaged you're going to be in that sequence."

Danny Bilson
Executive VP of Core Games, THQ

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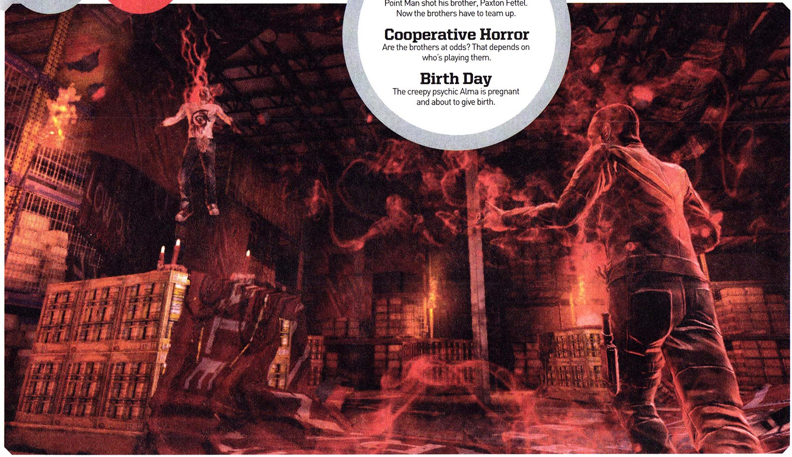
Quick Pitch

Family Feud
Point Man shot his brother, Paxton Fettel. Now the brothers have to team up.

Cooperative Horror
Are the brothers at odds? That depends on who's playing them.

Birth Day
The creepy psychic Alma is pregnant and about to give birth.



HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **April 2011** Pub **Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment** Dev **Day 1 Studios**

FEAR 3

The only thing we have to fear...

None of this will be pretty. The dysfunctional family reunion is about to pick up once again when Day 1 Studios and Warner Bros. offer unease and dread in the form of a first-person shooter.

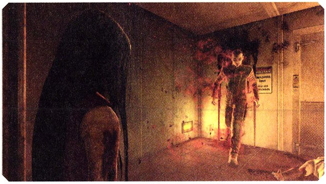
FEAR 3 takes place roughly nine months after the cataclysmic events of *FEAR 2: Project Origin*. For those unfamiliar with *FEAR's* lore, it largely concerns a creepy psychic woman Alma, who was experimented upon by an evil conglomerate, and her "sons" Point Man (whose real name remains unrevealed) and Paxton Fettel. Point Man killed Fettel at the end of the first game and, well, it's impossible to keep a bad cannibal down. Fettel has returned in ghost form.

In single-player mode, *FEAR 3* is a traditional shooter, emphasizing running and gunning against weaker foes such as cultists and then demanding the protagonist Point Man take cover against more well-armed toughs. The game becomes far more intriguing as a cooperative effort, with Fettel taking the role of Point Man's buddy or, perhaps, his nemesis.

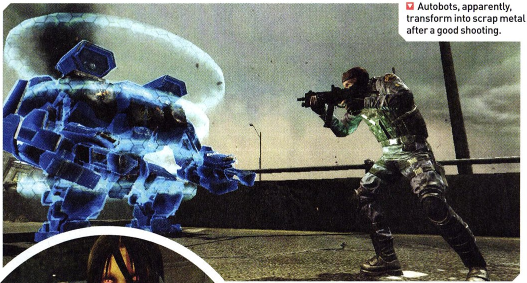
Here, developers at Day 1 suggest Point Man and Fettel can take adversarial roles, but this is perhaps an exaggeration. Ultimately, the brothers are on identical paths, with the goal being to see the game to its gory resolution, and neither character can proceed without the other. What the brothers can do is deprive each other of resources; Point Man's slaughter of foes prevents Fettel from taking possession of their bodies; Fettel can use his telekinetic abilities to snatch up guns littering the environment and then huck them into the void. It's probably safe to say Point Man and Fettel can serve as nuisances but not outright hindrances.

The game's plot hinges on Alma's pregnancy; as her contractions play out, the game world will shift and morph violently, as if the camera (or, perhaps, the cameraman) was being throttled. Strange visions featuring blurry images of the mother-to-be will haunt the players.

With the scene set, Day 1 earnestly captures a sense of quiet dread. Early stages take part in a huge shopping center plagued by the sort of malaise

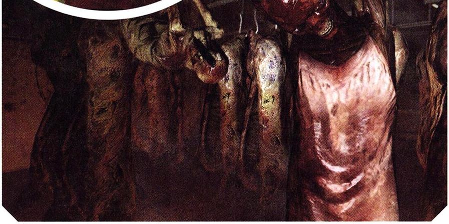


▲ **The family reunion promises less potato salad, more horror.**



Autobots, apparently, transform into scrap metal after a good shooting.

> "The dysfunctional family reunion is about to pick up once again."



only widespread gunplay and violence can properly address. *FEAR 3* does some interesting things with its environments, bathing the television section, for example, in a pleasant glow while simultaneously suggesting that something is very much amiss: The TV sets are on, but the store's overhead lighting is off.

A brief playtest hints at a troubled adventure. In tandem, Point Man and Fettel prove formidable, but the game seems to linger overmuch on its scenery. In a warehouse dappled with ladder bridges, the emphasis seemed to be on finding the exit amid the confusing level design and not so much on dealing with the terror from some great evil. Which leaves us to ponder if *FEAR 3* itself is worthy of the dread Franklin Delano Roosevelt suggested. **GREG ORLANDO**

Afeared!

POINT MAN

On Point
The shooter, and the sanest of the bunch. He killed his brother Fettel.

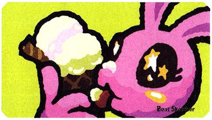
ALMA

Mama Mia!
Mother, sort of. Point Man and Fettel are clones. She's pregnant and angry.

FETTEL

Unfriendly Ghost
Dead and loving it. Fettel can possess bodies and use telekinesis.

Could Be A Contender



Format **PSN** ETA **November** Pub **SCEA**
Dev **SCE Japan Studio / noisycroak**

Beat Sketcher

Draw, pardner!

The Premise

To call this a "game" may be something of a misnomer: It's more a creative suite of interactive software with games included. it's like a virtual drawing tablet combined with a live video- and sound-construction tool.

The Reality

Bundled with the Move controller in Japan, it's a wildly creative product that's received little attention stateside.

The Hook

The Move controller becomes a paintbrush, letting us draw on whatever the camera captures; what's drawn onscreen is then converted into sound in real time. Choose color, shape, and brush size, and it affects not only the visual elements but also the tone of the sound.

The Chances

It's a lot more fun than it sounds, fusing elements of *Rez*, *EyePet*, and PhotoShop—with a tone reminiscent of *Katamari Damacy*—into a package that has us very, very excited.

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"One round in multiplayer has us sold"
– Game Informer

"The single-player looks like the best in the series"
– Destructoid

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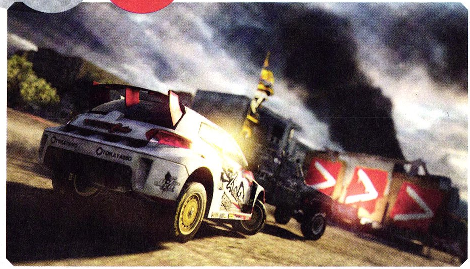
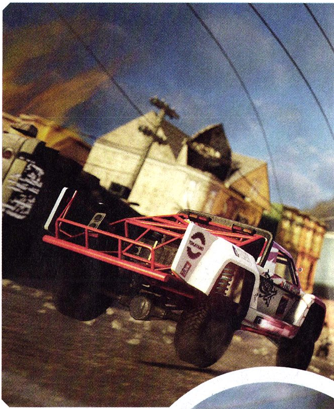




HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **Summer 2011** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Evolution Studios**

MotorStorm Apocalypse

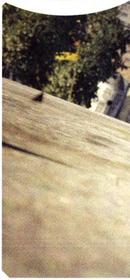
It'll take more than a seatbelt to save us all

Careening around tracks at breakneck speeds used to be enough to get racing fans' hearts pumping. Not anymore. Thankfully, the series that made the term "terrain deformation" sexy in previous entries is back with an end-of-the-world bang.

Those who've trudged through the mud and snow in Evolution Studios' first two efforts will instantly recognize many of *MotorStorm: Apocalypse's* core elements. It too is an over-the-top, arcadey racer, encouraging reckless pedal-pounding thrills over sim-like strategy. It also retains the tight, intuitive handling of the previous titles' vehicles, nicely balancing weight with the all-important sense of speed. It boasts a brimming roster of off-road–trampling rides and even adds some blacktop-scarring vehicles to the mix. But it's *Apocalypse's* setting that'll ultimately turn those knuckles white.

As the story goes, some adrenaline junkie drivers race in the sort of natural disaster-struck world we've seen Roland Emmerich blow up on the big screen countless times. Their storm-chasing stupidity puts players in the path of all kinds of screen-eclipsing destruction, while looters clutter what's left of the roads. Track pattern memorization won't help either, as ever-changing environments ensure each lap offers a new set of death traps. Razor-sharp visuals and special effects further fuel the death wish, guaranteeing rubberneckers a swift introduction to their air bags.

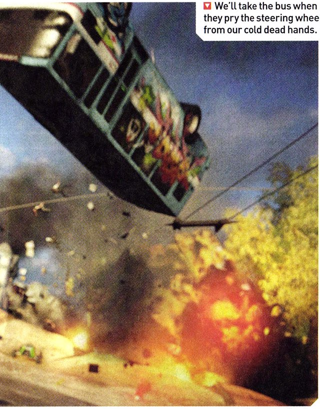
Our first run on the mid-campaign Hashbury track had us navigating floods and dirt roads while black-smoke-spewing buildings threatened to topple. By lap two, blacktop was crumbling beneath our Goodyears, those fire-engulfed structures were spitting flaming debris onto the track, and alternate routes were flooding. Pinned to the edge of our seats, we finally reached the finish line just as the pavement opened like the maw of a concrete monster, making Moses' parting of the Red Sea look like a cheap parlor trick. **MATT CABRAL**



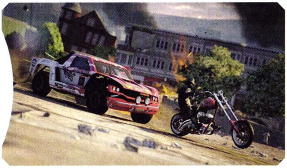
Destruction Derbies

Split/Second (PS3, 2010)
With an action-amped reality television show as its backdrop, *Split/Second* puts players in the role of contestants racing through Hollywood-like sets rigged with explosive special effects. Triggering these competition-thwarting set pieces from behind the wheel, while racing with precision, is the only way to achieve "season champion" status.

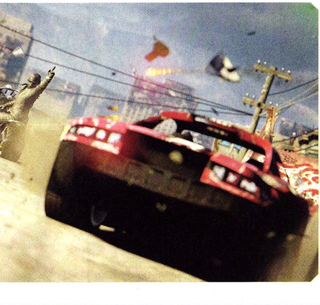
MotorStorm: Apocalypse (PS3, 2011)
Forget about rolling cameras and rigged sets; *MotorStorm: Apocalypse's* end-of-the-world scenario is the real deal. The disaster-seeking psycho drivers don't have detonators or any Hollywood tricks under their hoods, so skilled driving—and being a little bat-sh–t crazy—are their only defenses against Mother Nature.

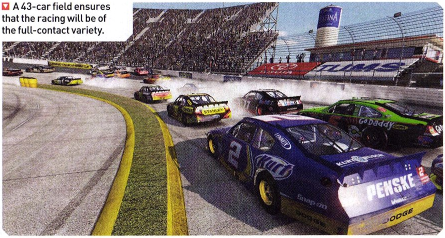


▼ We'll take the bus when they pry the steering wheel from our cold dead hands.



▲ *MotorStorm: Apocalypse* deftly blends catastrophic vehicle racing with an end-of-the-world sensibility. Repent now, and crash and burn when the game comes out next summer.





▼ A 43-car field ensures that the racing will be of the full-contact variety.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **February 2011** Pub **Activision** Dev **Eutechnyx**

NASCAR The Game 2011

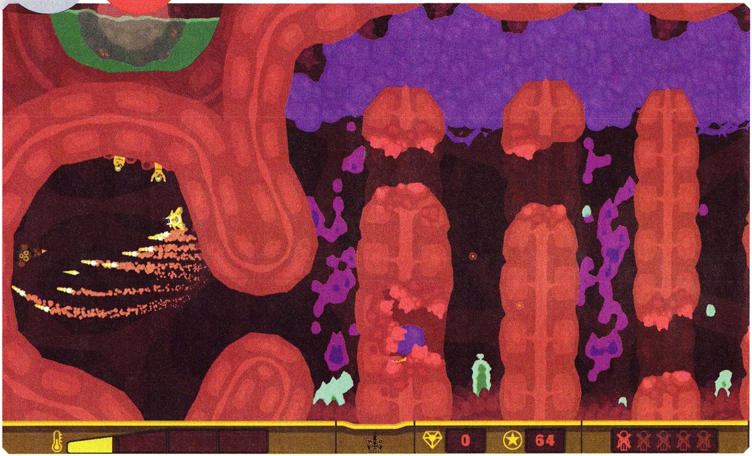
America's race series is back on track

Despite being the most popular U.S. auto racing series, NASCAR has never fared well in its videogame translations. We could say that no NASCAR game has exceled at translating the excitement and challenge of the real-life spectacle. Instead, we'll declare that they've been outright embarassments.

But just as a change in ownership, driver, and crew can turn the fortunes of a race team, publisher Activision's acquisition of the licensing rights and the involvment of noted driving game dev Eutechnyx *[SuperCar Challenge]* could have *NASCAR: The Game 2011* racing to the front of the pack.

Our early track testing revealed highly massaged driving dynamics delivering a feel akin to the simulation-focused *Gran Turismo* series. The level of simulation and difficulty is selectable, but the game already communicates the necessity to closely monitor in-pack car positioning, employ proper drafting technique, and select advantageous race lines. When the number of left turns in a NASCAR game is no longer readily noticeable, it's on the right track.

Beyond *NASCAR 2011's* polish, Eutechnyx promises an intense focus on the drivers and rivalries, which are the racing series' cornerstones. Considerable attention is being paid to the AI development of real-life drivers, so it might not be advisable to piss off Tony Stewart. Otherwise, he may decide to give us a personal tutorial of the game's extensive damage deformation feature. Sounds like our kind of driving lesson. **ROGER BURCHILL**



HANDS-ON Format **PSN** ETA **Fall** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Q-Games**

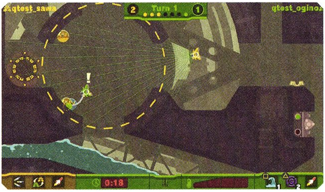
PixelJunk Shooter 2

Into the belly of the beast

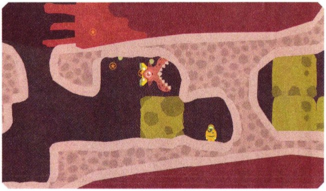
The original *PixelJunk Shooter* ended with the awakening of a giant worm-like creature, and the sequel begins with us inside its stomach. It's a trope, but here it's experienced through the eyes of Q-Games.

Once the beast is in the rear-view and the unfamiliar planet looms, the gameplay changes. Eventually, darkness becomes the main concern: Sit in it for too long and a horde of creatures will instantly swarm. To rescue scientists, we now have to bring light into darkened passages, something achieved by flipping switches, blasting through rocks, and moving light sources around with the grapple gun. Enemies such as the new Bullet Stormsters make the job harder, requiring grappling, pulling, and dismembering in a way that perfectly encapsulates the tone and fun of the series.

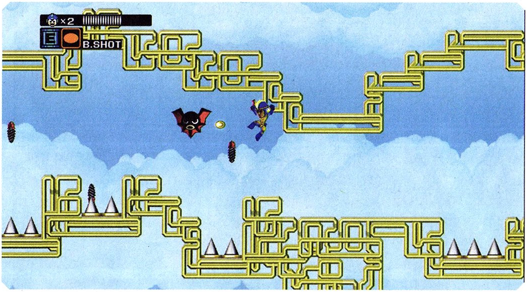
But competitive multiplayer is the game's Big New Thing: The online battle mode lets us go up against a friend across planets of increasing competitiveness, playing a frantic game of cat-and-mouse. Players pick three items from a selection of 20 (missiles, mines, camo), place bets (that's points, not money), and take turns as the hunter and the hunted. Dizzyingly fun stuff. EVAN SHAMOON



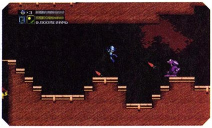
In multiplayer, players need to rescue scientists and drop them off in their own bubble. Competitors can also steal from each other's bubbles.



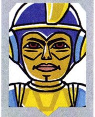
A new power-up called the Hungry Suit limits movement to four directions but lets players munch through just about anything in sight.



Players can build their own Mega Man stages and then make them wicked hard.



Mega Fan Service



Classic Capcom characters, such as *Street Fighter's* Ryu, *Ghosts 'N Goblins'* Sir Arthur and, coolest of all, Bad Box Art Mega Man—as featured on the now-classic NES packaging—can be selected for use within the character editor.

HANDS-ON Format **PSN** ETA **2011** Pub **Capcom** Dev **Capcom**

Mega Man Universe

Little big Mega Man

With Mega Man having starred in more sequels and spin-offs than you can shake a Servbot at, it's no wonder even his most faithful fans have lost track of the Dr. Wily-thwarting hero. But the Blue Bomber's been back on the radar lately, as buzz builds for his *LittleBigPlanet*-like *Mega Man Universe*. Borrowing a page from Sackboy's playbook, *Universe* puts players in the design chair, encouraging them to conjure their own customized characters and stages, then share them with friends online.

Promising an avatar editor, supporting options for costume and weapon tweaking, and an extremely robust level builder, *Universe* is putting the development tools in the players' hands. Further upping the fan-pleasing ante is the ability to play dress up with classic non-Mega Man Capcom characters. Additionally, gorgeous 2D/3D visuals and catchy tunes remain faithful to the 8-bit franchise while ushering it into the high-def era.

Specifics about the level and character creators' depth, intuitiveness, and online support are scarce, but we did side-scroll through some developer-created stages. Focused on platforming rather than combat, these levels tasked us with treading conveyor belts, hopping on moving elevators, climbing ladders, and sticking jumps, all while airborne enemies threatened to knock us into spikes, lava, and other infuriating intsa-death traps. (At the very least, we can confirm the editor allows budding designers to enforce the series' notorious difficulty!)

We look forward to fashioning our own Mega Man level— preferably one that can be completed without jumping—when *Universe* lands on PSN next year. **MATT CABRAL**

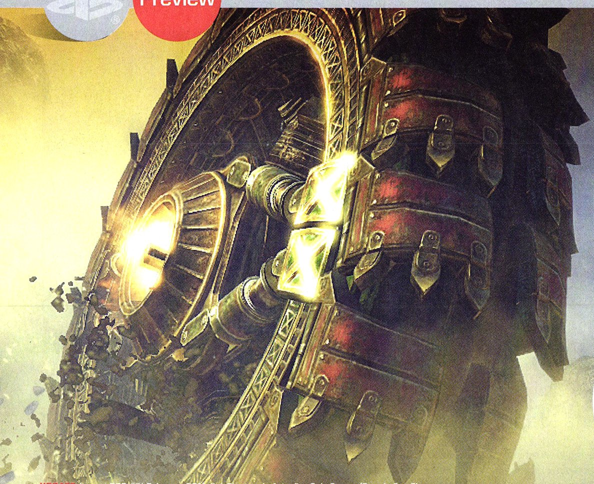
Trolls with top hats: that is all.

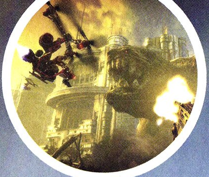
FIRST LOOK Format **PSN** ETA **2011** Pub **Focus Home Interactive**
Dev **Spiders Game Weavers**

Faery Legends of Avalon

Fight and flight

Ask people what power they would most like to have and they'll likely say the ability to shoot money from their hands. Or maybe flight. In *Faery: Legends of Avalon* players customize the look and skills of their own faery, then take flight in unique worlds with several companions, engaging in turn-based battles. The goal? To save a these worlds, all of which are based on different lores, including a mythical Celtic setting, an Arabian fantasyland, and a pirate ghostship. **ANNE LEWIS**





Creative slaughter bears fruit, with players able to use "skill points" to upgrade their weaponry.

Generic burly space marine #8,443 likes to whittle, walk on the beach, and listen to Foghat.

UPDATE Format **PS3** ETA **February 2011** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **Epic Games/People Can Fly**

Bulletstorm

Cloudy with a chance of decapitation

Sure, we enjoy peering from behind a sniper rifle, waiting, waiting, *waiting* for that perfect kill—but when it comes to our shooters, we also crave a more caffeinated cup of hot lead. Enter *Bulletstorm,* Electronic Art's unconventional run-and-gunner that's forgoing any sort of patience-trying realism in favor of a skyrocketing fun factor. The Epic Games/People Can Fly collaboration doesn't want us lying in wait or striking with surgical precision—unless, of course, we're aiming for someone's ass; instead, it wants to numb our trigger finger with non-stop action-fueled fun.

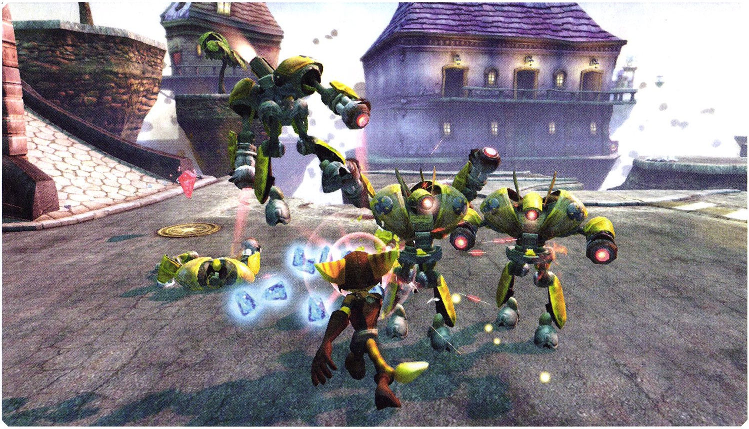
To ensure an ear-to-ear smile accompanies every empty clip, the development teams are incorporating incentive-building "skill shots" and "skill points." The former are creative kills, such as when a meatbag's head is separated from his shoulders by a slug to the throat—dubbed "gag reflex"—or when the aforementioned projectile to the pants yields a "rear entry" kill. Skill points is the currency accrued for slaying with style. More points means earning bigger, better ways to silence the flesh-hungering hordes roaming *Bulletstorm's* visually stunning sci-fi landscape. Once we've stashed enough cash, we can purchase new guns or upgrade our existing gear's main- and alternate corpse-eviscerating firepower.

During our demo, this meant adding a "charge shot" to the already capable Bouncer, a hand-cannon that appropriately enough, fired cannonballs. Once upgraded, the world-shaking weapon could shoot persistent ammo bowling over baddies long after it was released. We could also kick enemies into this bouncing ball of doom or boot it toward them. In addition to this lethal kickball, *Bulletstorm* puts players behind a brimming arsenal of upgradeable death-dealers, including the Leash (a whip-like melee weapon crackling with electricity) and the Flail Gun (a projectile chain anchored by grenades on both ends), which is perfect for boloing around necks then detonating.

Those who possess the patience to hide in cover while some brain-dead artificial intelligence decides whether or not to offer itself up for a head shot should by all means stick with those authenticity-aiming modern military shooters. However, those among us craving a more inspired murder/death/killfest—allowing us to joyfully rock out with our Glock out—would do well to prepare for the brewing *Bulletstorm.* **MATT CABRAL**

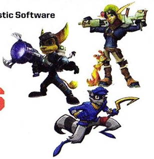
Dev Chat

Producer Tanya Jessen went all "crazy eyes" when asked how *Bulletstorm's* environments could be used to kill: "You can electrocute guys, kick them off ledges, impale them, wrap them with grenades, then kick them into other dudes to kill multiple dudes!"



HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **Spring 2011** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Nihilistic Software**

PlayStation Move Heroes

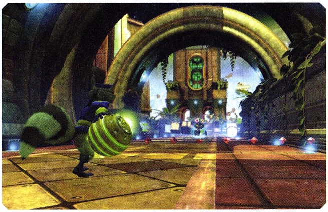


Mascot mashup

Now that *Heroes on the Move* has been re-dubbed *PlayStation Move Heroes,* Sony's ensured its stars-and-sidekicks title won't be confused with a full-on action/platformer. Still, with the motion-sensing peripheral's name front and center, there's little doubt players are in for some arm-flailing fun.

Ratchet and Clank, Jak and Daxter, and Sly Cooper and Bentley star in 50 levels, all based on environments from their respective franchises. Playing solo or with a buddy, participants collect items, beat back swarms of baddies, and race against the clock. All characters will be playable in every level, but our demo focused on Clank and Jak. As Ratchet's robo-buddy, we needed to navigate discs into targets spread across a space station. Gliding the projectiles through the obstacle-filled environment was a blast, and the breezy controls buoyed our confidence enough to fly off the beaten path to collect stuff.

The Jak challenge, set in Sly's Paris, had the fuzzy protagonist destroying metallic menaces with a whip-like mace. The beat-'em-up gameplay felt less inspired than piloting Clank's sawblade-like frisbees, but the world and its effects impressed. As a second-generation Move title, *Heroes'* overall audio and visual presentation definitely trumps the less polished launch lineup. Hopefully, the promising mascot-fueled gameplay will prove—pardon the pun—moving. MATT CABRAL



▲ *PlayStation Move Heroes* allows for the thieving raccoon Sly Cooper to be his rogue-like self on 50 different stages.

▲ Where's everyone's favorite mascot, Boogerman? Or no one's most favorite mascot, Bubsy? They're at home, crying in their soup!

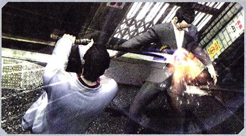
The latest on...

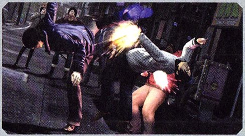
New shots, new games, new info

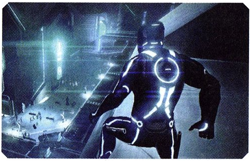
Yakuza 4

Format **PS3** ETA **March 2011** Pub **Sega** Dev **Sega**

Players who've stomped their way through the Japanese underworld in previous *Yakuza* titles will feel comfortable here. Returning protagonist Kazuma is joined by three new goons, adding variety to the franchise's crotch-kicking formula. The shady trio—a loan shark, an ex-con, and a corrupt cop—bring all-new bone-crunching moves and a fresh arsenal of blunt and bladed weapons. When we're not exploring the game's red-light district or engrossed in its pulpy plot, we'll be tossing scumbags from rooftops, doing dental work (teeth are graphically ejected from bloodied mouths) with a Louisville Slugger or splitting skulls via exaggerated golf swings—fore!



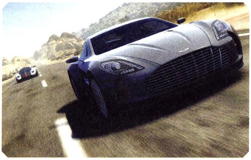




TRON: Evolution

Format **PS3** ETA **December** Pub **Disney Interactive Studio** Dev **Propaganda**

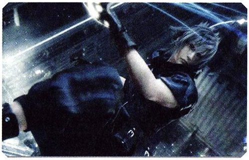
Our hands-on time with *TRON: Evolution* revealed a single-player mode with the proper *TRON* look and feel, and accessible multiplayer hinting at greater depth. But we crave more details of the prequel storyline that's a precursor for the forthcoming *TRON: Legacy* film.



Test Drive Unlimited 2

Format **PS3** ETA **Winter 2011** Pub **Atari** Dev **Eden Studios**

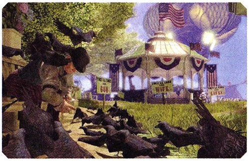
Don't get too distracted by that sexy, sexy car. It's the sexy, sexy *player* that this game's all about. Collecting and racing cars is the centerpiece of a posh lifestyle players can build and customize, including everything from trendy outfits to sprawling mansions.



Final Fantasy Versus XIII

Format **PS3** ETA **2011** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **Square Enix**

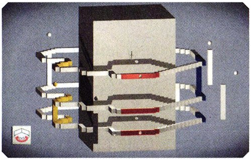
Helmed by Tetsuya Nomura, designer of almost every iconic *Final Fantasy* character, this is a much more "realistic" vision of the *Final Fantasy XIII* world with a modern city setting. It also promises to be open world, unlike its crushingly linear predecessor.



BioShock: Infinite

Format **PSN** ETA **2012** Pub **2K Games** Dev **Irrational Games**

His name is Charles, and he's sitting on a bench. The signs read: They'll take your gun. They'll take your wife. They'll take your business. They'll take your life! Despite the sunny setting, this is a grim world indeed. But one we can't wait to explore and experience.



echochrome ii

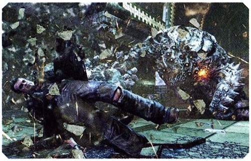
Format **PSN** ETA **Winter 2011** Pub **SCEA** Dev **SCEA/Artoon**

As in the original mindbender, players must shape levels by changing the angle of the spotlight, thus connecting separate shadows to create platforms and passageways for the figure to traverse. It's beautiful, smart, and PlayStation Move-only.

Patapon 3

Format **PSP** ETA **2011** Pub **SCEA** Dev **SCE Japan Studio**

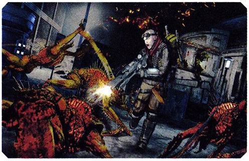
Since the standard warrior array isn't enough, *Patapon 3* introduces the Superhero Patapon, a customizable fighter with its own special attacks. Play co-op with seven others and communicate via Pata-Text chat. We're anticipating an irresistably infectious soundtrack as well.



NeverDead

Format **PS3** ETA **2011** Pub **Konami** Dev **Rebellion**

Zombies may soon be a videogame cliche, but *NeverDead* has an innovative twist. In this macabre shooter, players reassemble their body after having it blown apart by gunfire. A recent video shows our hero's head rolling around *Katamari Damacy*-style and reclaiming its limbs.



Red Faction: Armageddon

Format **PS3** ETA **May 2011** Pub **THQ** Dev **Volition**

Sadly, the latest *Red Faction* has been delayed until May. But the upside is that Mars is beautiful in the springtime. The hook for this new outing is, er, the same as ever: destruction. Thanks to the indoor setting though, players can now bring down ceilings and walls.

Prinny 2: Dawn of Operation Panties, Dood!

Format **PSP** ETA **Jan 2011** Pub **NIS America** Dev **Nippon Ichi**

We're tempted to suggest the name says it all, but that name is really just a jumble of unconnected words that has us confused. Suffice to say this is the sequel to the absurd hack-'n'-slasher starring our favorite demon penguin.

Gut Reaction

What's strong and what's wrong

▲A Movement
A million Move units shipped in 30 days—and those numbers don't include the holiday rush.

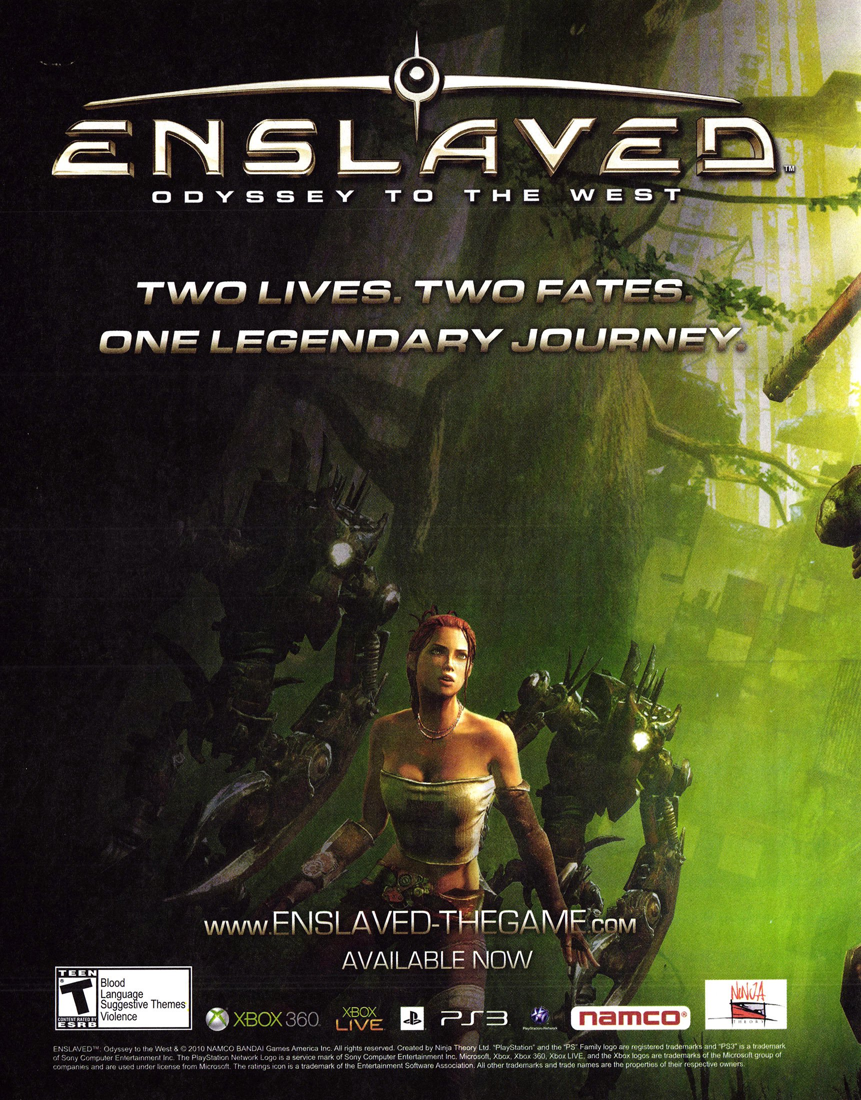
▲Mass Appeal
BioWare's going the extra mile getting PS3 players up to speed for *Mass Effect 2*.

▲Our Need For Speed
So simple, yet astoundingly fun. Cops. Racers. Chases. Awesome.

▼GT5 Stalls
File under: Totally expected but still surprised. Another delay for *Gran Turismo 5*, though it might still make it for the holidays.

▼Fallout Fumbles
We already debated it elsewhere in the issue, but come on guys: How about squashing all those bugs *before* release?

▼Fourteen Flops
Final Fantasy XIV gets pummelled on PC. PC guys not getting it? Or a sign of what's to come?



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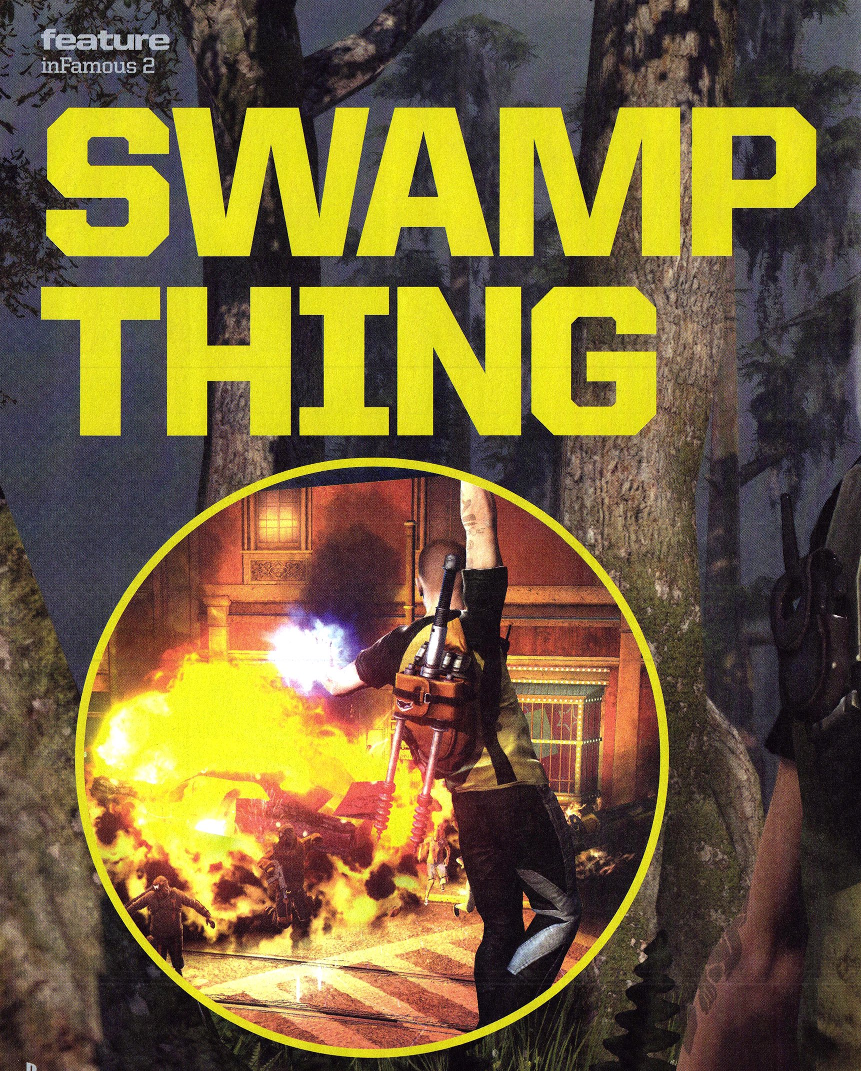
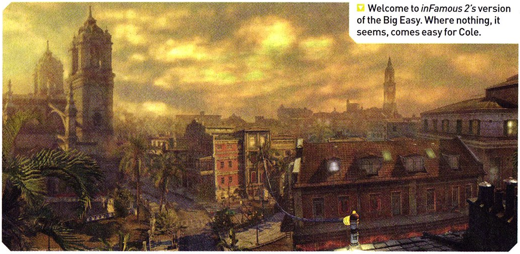
SWAMP THING



SUCKER PUNCH PRODUCTIONS EXPLORES THE DEEP SOUTH IN THE NEXT CHAPTER OF ITS ELECTRIC SUPERHERO SAGA, **INFAMOUS 2**

BY EVAN SHAMOON



Welcome to *inFamous 2's* version of the Big Easy. Where nothing, it seems, comes easy for Cole.

"The thing that kills me is that electricity is like the great magic of our time."

Nate Fox, game director of *inFamous 2,* is responding to our question about why so few superheroes seem to be able to harness electricity. "It's absolutely fundamental to our society," he continues, "and yet not a lot of us understand what's going on. So to me, a superhero with electricity represents the lifeblood of the city—it's the modern age, right?"

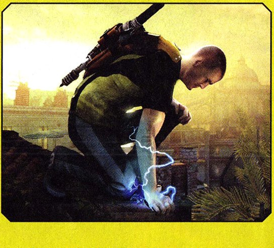
And yes, the superhero of whom Fox speaks is Cole MacGrath, star and centerpiece of the *inFamous* franchise. Where the first game was MacGrath's origin story—the chapter in which our hero both discovers and slowly learns how to use his superpowers—*inFamous 2* is, by extension, the phase in which those abilities become vastly elevated if not mastered. Where our hero takes off the training wheels and turns the proverbial volume up to 11.

The same thing might be said, incidentally, for Sucker Punch Productions. The original game represented many firsts for the studio, all at once: its first foray into the world of mature games set in a realistic world (the developer had worked exclusively on the cartoony *Sly Cooper* franchise for the preceding decade); its first open-world game; and its first attempt to develop a game for the PlayStation 3 hardware.

It was a lot to bite off to be sure, but the result was a certifiable hit: merging elements of parkour, platforming, and a healthy dose of electrified combat, the third-person action game found itself a sizable audience and generally positive critical reception. Though there were flaws—some repetitive design decisions and a rather lackluster lead character to name a couple—it became one of the console's most successful "second wave" titles.

We're going hands-on with the follow up to that impressive first effort at Sucker Punch's Bellevue, Wash., headquarters, a few miles from Seattle and mere blocks from other high-profile game development studios, including both Bungie and Valve. What we're seeing (and playing) up high in its 26th floor offices is far from finished, but it's already clear *inFamous 2* is going to eclipse its predecessor in nearly every way. "I read a lot of comics as a kid and I'm really glad that videogames have finally gotten to a point where we can take these things that you'd see in comics or movies and actually experience them," Fox says.

And he means it.

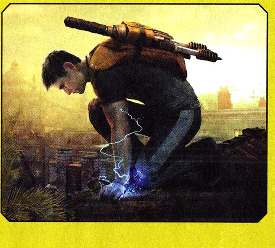


Character Study

The many faces of Cole MacGrath

The original *inFamous* had plenty going for it, but was somewhat lacking in terms of personality–most conspicuously that of its protagonist, Cole MacGrath. While certainly agile and deadly, the everyman-cum-superman lacked charisma, and as such undercut the narrative punch of the experience.

Fast-forward to E3 2010 and Sucker Punch's grand unveiling of its sequel. As a surprise to some, Cole's appearance has been changed: His leather jacket is gone, his hair has grown out, and he's seemingly had a touch of polygonal plastic surgery to boot. It's a slightly kinder, slightly gentler Cole, and the fanboys, believe it or not, aren't happy. Weeks later a new Cole emerges from Sucker Punch HQ, and the angry Internet mob seems appeased. So, what gives?

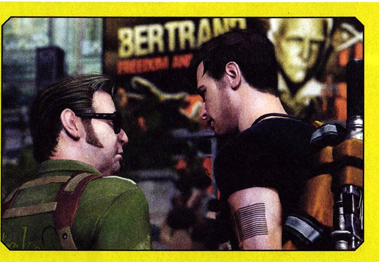


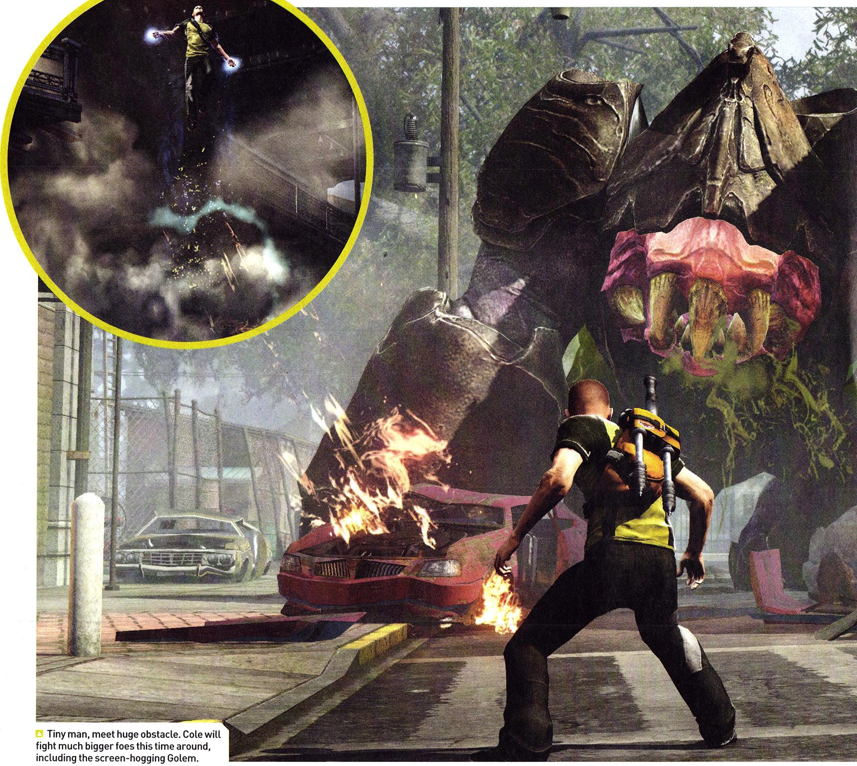
IT'S ALREADY CLEAR INFAMOUS 2 IS GOING TO ECLIPSE ITS PREDECESSOR

"Eric Ladin, our new voice and motion capture actor—he's a different kind of guy. We wanted Cole to be a little more approachable, a little more open, not so gruff and negative," explains art director Mathias Lorenz of the thinking behind the process of revising Cole. "We wanted to emphasize parkour in this game, so he had to be athletic. We wanted to get rid of the jacket to be able to show off more of his physique, because we want to focus on climbing and running—you see the muscles more without it. We needed to do more with head movement and facial animation, because this time around we're doing 3D cutscenes in addition to the 2D ones. We needed to do a new head, technically, and all that drove our decision to think about Cole from a visual standpoint. The more effete Cole was our first version, and we got a lot of *feedback* on that."

The "feedback" he's referring to is, specifically, 17 pages of profanity-laden posts unleashed upon the *inFamous 2* message boards, mostly insistent that the new Cole was not, in fact, Cole, but rather an imposter incapable of the violence required of him and more likely to frequent drinking establishments catering solely to men. And so, with what we imagine to be a fair amount of eye-rolling, the team went back to the drawing board.

The result borrows elements of the two, fusing new and old Cole into a man seemingly capable of human emotion, but unlikely to shed a tear. Still, while the decision was likely out of his hands, Lorenz seems clear on the kind of character he's designing. "We never changed the character—just the visual representation of him," he says. "The type of person that Eric [Ladin] is inspired our first design, and we're still continuing down that road."



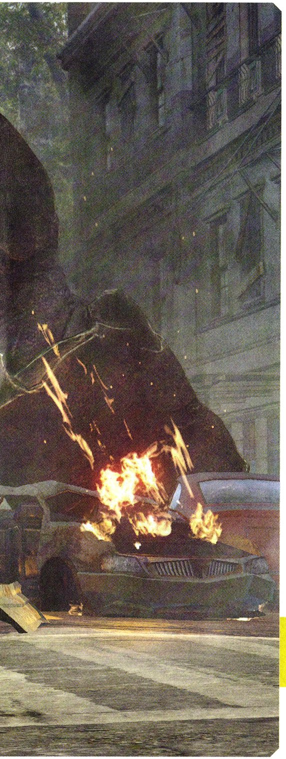


Tiny man, meet huge obstacle. Cole will fight much bigger foes this time around, including the screen-hogging Golem.

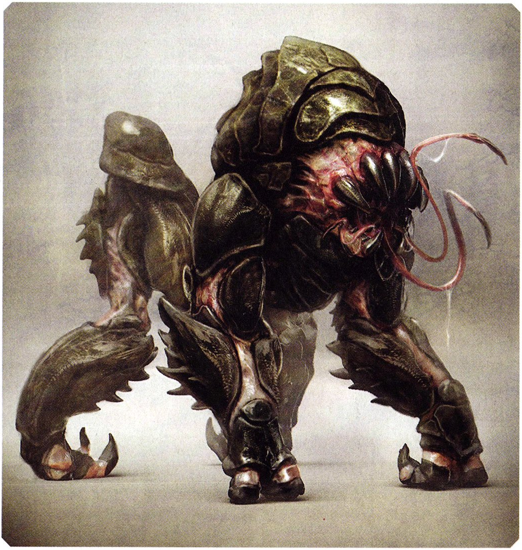
I*nFamous 2* picks up almost right where the original left off, following our hero Cole MacGrath's defeat at the hands of "The Beast." Rather than returning to the metropolitan environs of Empire City, however, the sequel takes place in New Marais—a re-imagined New Orleans that's pretty much falling apart at the floorboards. In a franchise so infused with the environment in which it's set, choosing New Orleans was of course no accident; the team has quite purposefully created an entirely new sandbox for the player to experiment with and it's a visual and mechanical refresh that's been built from the ground up.

"We looked at stuff in Paris, Rome—different types of roofs, chimneys, two-, three-, four-story buildings—the kind of thing we weren't able to do in Empire City," says art director Mathias Lorenz of the architecture found in New Marais. This results in much more varied height within the levels, significantly affecting how it feels to move MacGrath through them. "We're getting away from right angles and straight verticals and horizontals—which by definition you have in places like New York and Empire City," Lorenz says. Here we have more elaborate architectural elements—verandas, patios, and other flourishes that affect the geometry, a strong antidote to the skyscrapers and gridded streets of the original. Expect real variety this time around with swamps, cemeteries, and slums, along with a red light district full of blinking signs and a seediness we can almost taste (but most likely won't, as the sequel will remain a Teen-rated game).

The city is one built on and around the swamps, inspired by New Orleans in particular and the American South in general. The result is that whether it's paved road or concrete sidewalk beneath our feet, the ground we're walking on isn't quite flat. "The city was built on swampland, so stuff starts to sag and dip," says Lorenz. "The streets are



The Golem is a mutation created with the swamp in mind: a buggy, reptilian, gassy, gooey monstrosity with a layer of wetness beneath its hard exoskeleton.



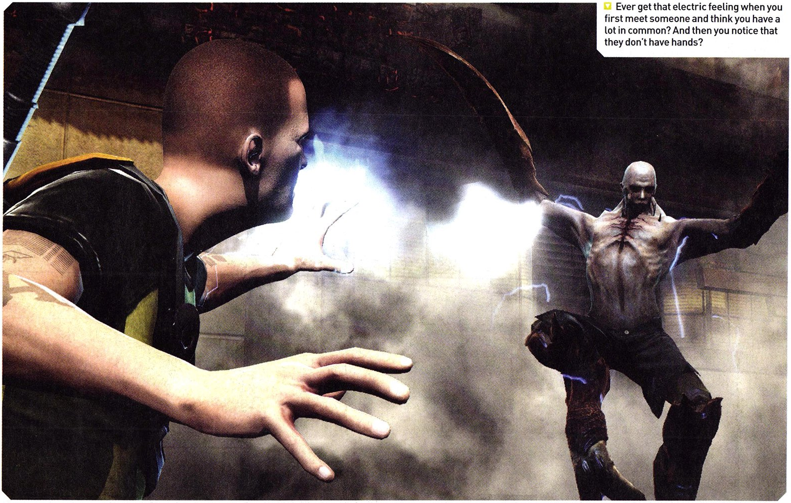
WE'LL HAVE MORE TO WORRY ABOUT THAN JUST OVERGROWN LAWNS AND HUNGRY MOSQUITOES

not 100 percent flat. It's expensive [in terms of performance], but it's very cool." Indeed, the whole game has a swampy, humid, hazy feel with the sort of thick, moist air that breeds as much bacteria as it does monster fiction (think HBO's *True Blood*). "I lived in Florida for awhile, and if you don't mow the lawn, four weeks later stuff starts to grow and sprout in places you had no idea were even possible," says Lorenz. "The vegetation starts to encroach." Make no mistake: We'll have more to worry about than just overgrown lawns and hungry mosquitoes in *inFamous 2*.

When we catch up with him, MacGrath is attempting to track down and head off The Beast, which is making its way down the East Coast and leaving a wake of destruction in its path. Before the eventual confrontation, however, our hero is trying to learn more about the Ray Sphere that gave him his fancy superpowers and looking for a scientist who he thinks can help him put the kibosh on the massive monster.

It wouldn't be much of a game without conflict, however, and unfortunately for Cole, New Marais is run by the Militia—a group of bloodthirsty vigilantes with an extreme distaste for mutants. "They hate everyone that's impure, not natural—which in Cole's case means 'has electrical powers,'" says lead designer Darren Braidges. "They've also heard of what he did in Empire City. It's the whole, 'You ain't from around here, boy' thing." Bertrand is the Militia's political leader—a group that, though presented as the saviors of New Marais, is actually running a protection racket in the city like so many gangsters and drug dealers.

In our demo, Bertrand is holding court at an anti-mutant hate rally when he's abruptly interrupted by the game's other main faction: The Corrupted, a wave of mutants that has emerged from the nearby swamplands. These guys are as gruesome as expected and while we're able to have our way with its lower-level members, the crown prince doesn't look quite so approachable. The Golem (name subject to change) is a screen-filling behemoth and something of a swamp-centric version of what one might expect from mixing elements of insects, alligators, and wooly mammoth—all with the temperament of a rhino and the precise, snapping tongue of a frog. He's bulbous, dangerous, and will most certainly not be our friend on Facebook.



Ever get that electric feeling when you first meet someone and think you have a lot in common? And then you notice that they don't have hands?

MIXING MELEE AND PROJECTILE ATTACKS IS FLUID, DYNAMIC, INTUITIVE, AND INTENSE

"From the beginning we were making a ranged combat game—that was kind of our focus," Braidges says of his work on the original *inFamous*. "But when people think of a superhero, the image that comes to mind is of Superman punching someone in the face. We were surprised—we gave people these lightning powers and the first thing they do is run up to an enemy and start mashing the Square button trying to hit people." And hit people they did, though perhaps with a bit less gusto than they may have expected.

In response, one of the team's major focuses this time is melee combat and much of this has been designed around Cole's new Amp weapon—a kind of electrical cattle prod serving up some bone-shattering thrills. We got to try this out first hand, and despite its relatively early state, the combat is unique, intense, and uncommonly cinematic. The Square and Triangle buttons are mapped to light and strong melee attacks and players can also execute combos with impressive finishing moves. Mixing up one's melee and projectile attacks is a rather fluid process and the result is more dynamic, more intuitive, more intense combat.

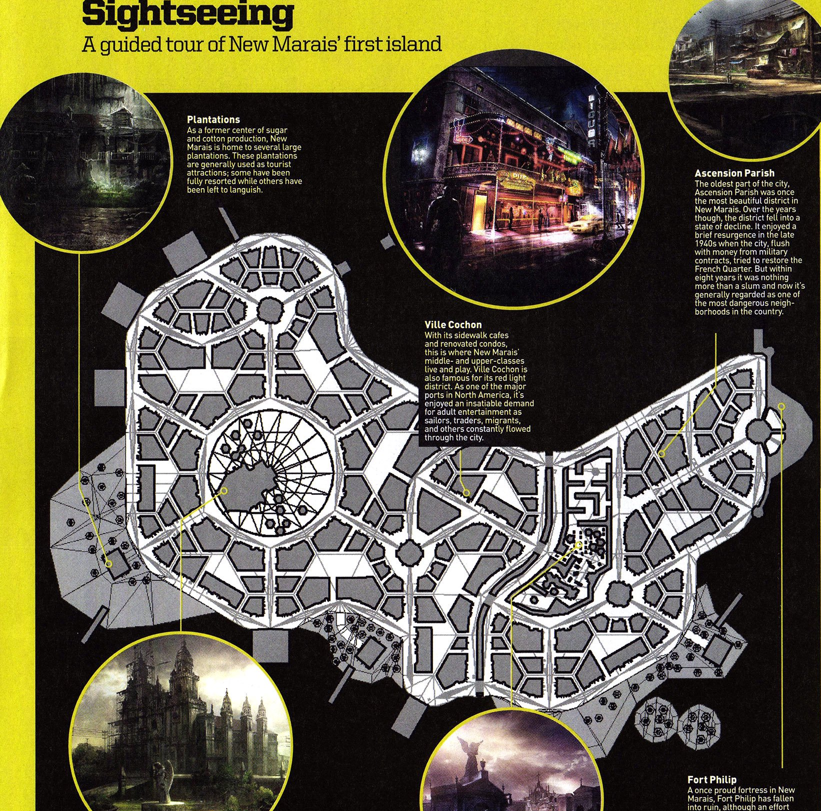
The real fun begins, however, when we start to use our superpowers with a bit more reckless abandon. What's most apparent is just how destructible the world of New Marais actually is: balconies collapse, cars hurtle down streets, and seemingly everything in sight can be tossed, tipped, or completely turned to rubble. The Ionic Vortex is a spectacular mini electrical tornado sparking its way down streets, mopping up cars, people, and just about everything else in its path, while zapping walls it comes in contact with and eventually hurling any contents up into the sky. It is easily one of the more impressive attacks we've seen in a videogame to date. "It's not rocket science, but everybody loves blowing things up," Braidges says.

But *inFamous* is as much a game about movement as it is combat and great efforts are being made to elevate the parkour aspects of the experience. "Our goal was to integrate his electrical powers into his parkour moveset," Braidges says, "and to make the city more of a jungle gym." Cole can now zip automatically along power cables running across the walls of buildings, as well as grind down the lines running from one telephone pole to the next. The result is that players can now jet through narrow, intricate urban areas more quickly. Wall tethers are new this time around and, while we still spent plenty of time climbing, Cole's gliding skills (along with the sheer dynamism of his skillset) have been extended, making for a smoother experience from top to bottom.

For Cole, the soggy marshland setting presents its own set of complications. The swamps of New Marais present plenty of insidious shallow pools of water that creep into the game's sandbox; while it's not functioning just yet, we've been told that the water will have some rather traumatic effects on its surroundings (and inhabitants) when conducting electricity. Whether this will be used for offensive attacks or merely serve as perilous territory for the player, however, remains to be seen.

Sightseeing

A guided tour of New Marais' first island



Plantations
As a former center of sugar and cotton production, New Marais is home to several large plantations. These plantations are generally used as tourist attractions; some have been fully resorted while others have been left to languish.

Ascension Parish
The oldest part of the city, Ascension Parish was once the most beautiful district in New Marais. Over the years though, the district fell into a state of decline. It enjoyed a brief resurgence in the late 1940s when the city, flush with money from military contracts, tried to restore the French Quarter. But within eight years it was nothing more than a slum and now it's generally regarded as one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the country.

Ville Cochon
With its sidewalk cafes and renovated condos, this is where New Marais' middle- and upper-classes live and play. Ville Cochon is also famous for its red light district. As one of the major ports in North America, it's enjoyed an insatiable demand for adult entertainment as sailors, traders, migrants, and others constantly flowed through the city.

Fort Philip
A once proud fortress in New Marais, Fort Philip has fallen into ruin, although an effort was made in the late 1990s to restore it. When the stock market collapsed, funding dried up and the work wasn't completed. Joseph Bertrand III now uses the fort for his own nefarious reasons, although publicly he claims to be finishing its restoration.

St. Ignatius Cathedral
Resting on the site of one of the first missionaries established in the United States, St. Ignatius was built in the 1850s. Because of instability in its foundation (caused by the high water table), the church is constantly in need of repair. Several of the city's main utility lines run through its grounds, complicating construction efforts.

St. Charles Cemetery
The city's largest and oldest cemetery, St. Charles was expanded twice, once after the Civil War and a second time after the cholera outbreak of 1867-68. Outside of the cemetery, a statue called The Innocent commemorates the victims of the cholera epidemic. The cemetery is well maintained—a point of pride in the city.

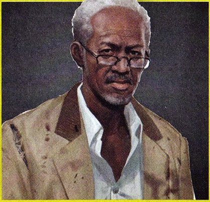
COLE'S ENHANCED POWERS ALSO POSE MORE OF A THREAT TO THOSE HE'S SUPPOSED TO SAVE

Because the game is so early, there are still quite a few things the developers don't want to talk about, such as how they're going to deal with the moral choices and consequences of the first game. What we do know is that the morality system will be there and that it will take a very different form than it did in the original. "It seems like you're not really a superhero unless you have people you care about, who are at risk, and who you want to save," Fox says. "You're the only person who can do what must be done."

It will also include more narrative consequence; we were told that at least once during the course of the game, the player will have the choice between two truly different branches to take through the rest of the story. Of course, this includes another complication that's still to be addressed: Depending on how you played the original *inFamous,* the Cole MacGrath you were left with at the end of the game could range widely and how the diverse set of character arc permutations will be woven into the sequel remains to be seen.

While everything here is clearly being ramped in one direction (read, up), Fox sees the sequel as actually being more emotionally grounded that the original. We've yet to meet any of the virtuous characters within the context of the game, but Fox insists interpersonal relationships and narratives will play a much greater role. And surprisingly, that the enhanced powers present more of a threat to those he's ostensibly supposed to save. "The scale of the rest of the world is the same," Fox says. "In fact, it's more human: The world's more breakable, people are just as healthy as they were in the first game—as in they're fragile. Cars are fragile. Parts of buildings come down. But Cole is strong, the monsters are strong, and the repercussions of using your powers indiscriminately create, I think, more repercussions to your actions."

Fox sums up what's sure to be great about *inFamous 2.* "Climbing around this big three-dimensional sculpture and using your electrical superpowers to grind on high-voltage wires, floating through the city, grabbing onto a water tower, climbing up, jumping off, and slamming down onto the ground with a pulsing blast that clears the block?" He pauses, smiling. "That's it, man."



The Good Doctor

New to *inFamous 2* is Dr. Sebastian Wolfe. He's one of the scientists who pioneered the Ray Sphere technology and he has hidden Blast Cores—infused quartz crystals bursting with densely concentrated Ray Sphere energy—around New Marais in order to prevent them from falling into the wrong hands. When Cole comes into contact with a Blast Core, his body absorbs the energy within and he gains a powerful new ability.

What does all this mean for the player? Essentially, Cole's got another high-value collectible to search for in the environments in addition to the Blast Shards (which increase the amount of energy that Cole can store, just like in the original game). Find them all and Cole might just become strong enough to defeat The Beast.

FILM HAS **STAR WARS.** TELEVISION HAS **STAR TREK.** AND NOW, VIDEOGAMES HAVE...

MASS EFFECT 2

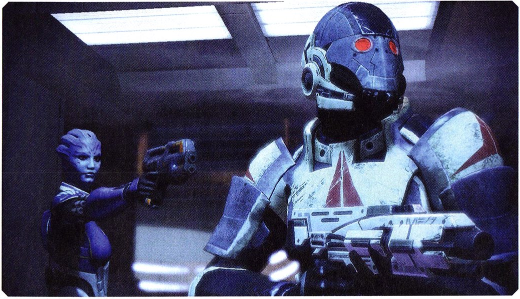
BY SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

So it turns out one of Pluto's moons is actually a dormant piece of alien technology capable of instantly jumping ships to an entirely different part of the galaxy. Crazy, right? We don't know it yet, though. We actually won't discover this tidbit of information until around the year 2149. But at that point, we'll not only discover that we're not alone in the Milky Way, we're actually late to the party. Wars were waged, races eradicated, and peace restored all before mankind even landed on the moon. But we'll soon be a part of it, a political newcomer fighting for a place within the established order.

It's a fascinating and original approach to the idea of discovering alien life—we're neither the misguided conquerors nor the imperiled underdogs, instead we're simply marginalized participants in a (relatively) civilized interstellar community. It's also why Commander Shepard is so important. As the first human accepted into the Spectres—a prestigious, omnipotent peacekeeping agency composed of the galaxy's foremost badasses—he'll serve as the heroic face of mankind and a living embodiment of its worth. But that's only the beginning.

The original *Mass Effect*—a sweeping space opera born of the same timeless material that produced a galaxy far, far away—chronicles Shepard's tragic and triumphant efforts to eradicate a sentient race of flesh-harvesting machines and expose a treacherous double agent within the Spectres. It also established an astoundingly rich and detailed universe filled with deeply relatable characters while combining traditional role-playing-game conventions with solid shooter gameplay.

Now *Mass Effect 2* is looking to take that same evolving, decision-driven story experience and unique RPG/shooter hybrid gameplay and boldly go where no game in the franchise has gone before: the PlayStation 3.



Itching for action? Conversations contain an interrupt system allowing players to cut straight to the point.

The *Mass Effect* experience was previously only available on PC and the Xbox 360. In fact, Microsoft still owns the publishing rights to the original game, meaning PS3 gamers will have no choice but to start with the sequel. This might seem like a minor tragedy for PlayStation fans, but according to project director Casey Hudson, it's more like a blessing in disguise.

"We designed *ME2* knowing that a lot of people may not have played *ME1*, so when we designed it originally, the whole point of it was to be a really great entry point," Hudson says. "It's a vastly superior game, so we wanted people to be able to start there."

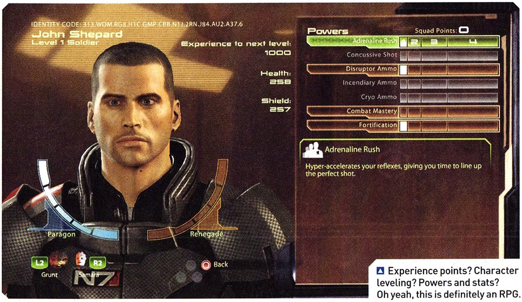
Still, BioWare understands that story is paramount to its franchise and refused to leave PS3 players completely out in the cold. So in lieu of releasing the original game on PS3, the developers commissioned Dark Horse Comics to craft a stylish interactive comic that will be "integrated right into the beginning section in a really interesting and seamless way," according to Hudson.

Not only does the comic encapsulate the original story, it allows players to make all the critical high-level choices shaping the world each player experiences in the sequel. "It's basically a save-game creator," Hudson explains. "The moment you enter *ME2*, you feel like this is your universe already." Say, for instance, that we choose to spare one of *ME1's* principal characters during the comic. When we arrive on his planet in the sequel, he'll be a prominent political leader and an instant ally. The political climate on his planet would have been much different had we chosen to kill him instead.

See Ya, Space Cowboy

Once players navigate the comic's gauntlet of gut-wrenching decisions and gain some insight into the greater universe, they'll be plunged directly into the game's storyline. At *Mass Effect 2's* onset, Commander Shepard is killed when a previously unidentified alien race known as the Collectors attacks his ship. Lucky for him, a shadowy semi-criminal organization known as Cerberus rescues and rebuilds him.

In return, Cerberus asks Shepard to investigate the unexplained disappearances of human colonies across the galaxy, which means tracing the source of the abductions and paying the culprits a visit. "The stakes are pretty high and it's pretty cool how much we telegraph the fact it's going to be a suicide mission and people are going to die," says



IDENTITY CODE: 313.WDM.RG8.H1C.GMP.CBB.N1J.2RN.J84.AU2.A37.6

John Shepard

Level 1 Soldier

Experience to next level: 1000

Health: 258

Shield: 257

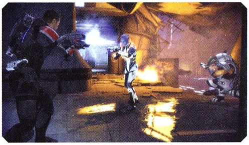
Powers

Squad Points: 0

Adrenaline Rush

Hyper-accelerates your reflexes, giving you time to line up the perfect shot.

Experience points? Character leveling? Powers and stats? Oh yeah, this is definitely an RPG.



The shadowy head of Cerberus, The Illusive Man (voiced by Martin Sheen) provides Shepard with valuable information and generally creeps us out.

So long, and thanks for all the fish!

So what's the real secret to *Mass Effect's* success? Fish. No wait...fish and love. "In stores, you'll find things like fish. And then when you go back to your quarters, you've got a fish tank and now you'll see new fish swimming in there. These are things–you know, they're not bullet points that you're going to put on a box or something that technically make a better game–that I think are things that just help you fall in love with a game experience because so much love was put into them," says creative director Casey Hudson. Sure, tiny aquatic collectibles may not make a game great, but Hudson's comments provide a telling insight into the design philosophy behind *Mass Effect 2*.

"IT'S GOING TO BE A SUICIDE MISSION AND PEOPLE ARE GOING TO DIE."

Galaxy Map
Open

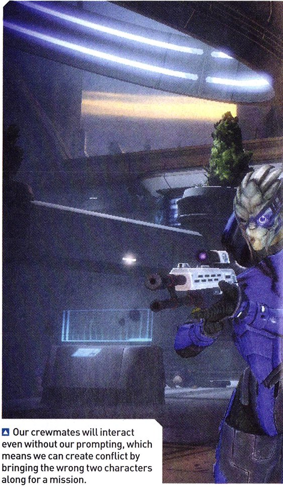
On Shepard's ship, *The Normandy,* players can upgrade characters, interact with their crew, and browse the galactic map for their next mission.

Hudson. "I think people sense that as they get toward the end of the game and realize Commander Shepard can actually die as part of one of the endings. It really drives home the anxiety for people."

Reluctantly, Shepard agrees and sets out to assemble a team to aid him in what amounts to a classic hero's journey wrapped in a deep-space conspiracy. Of course, that's just the basic plot. The actual story we experience changes drastically depending upon a huge array of factors: the crew members we choose to recruit, how we choose to handle each unique scenario we encounter while scouring the galaxy, the reputation that we build in the process, and so on.

"It's so far beyond the idea of branching. It's more like sculpting because there are so many different variables that you're changing," says Jesse Houston, the game's executive producer. "The whole game is really about preparing for this final mission and putting together your crew, and therefore, all of the different sub-plots that you do end up contributing to really determine the level of success you have at the end of the game."

Ingeniously, this solves one of role-playing games' oldest problems: The meaningless side quest. Though many of the game's missions are optional and don't directly progress the "human abduction" plotline, they do alter the group dynamic shaping the entire experience. Help a crew member rescue a former student from the clutches of a brutal mercenary or take a detour to investigate a distress signal that could reunite another crew member with his long-lost father, and their loyalty will grow. "They'll perform better for you and they'll do things for you that they wouldn't otherwise do," says Houston.

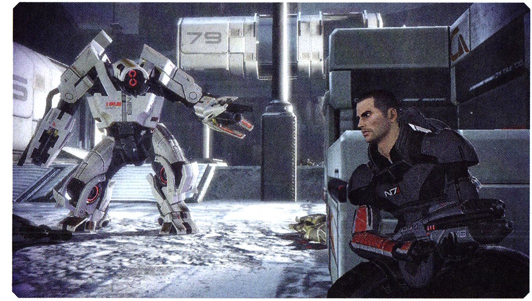


▲ Our crewmates will interact even without our prompting, which means we can create conflict by bringing the wrong two characters along for a mission.

Shepard Shot First

Earning loyalty, however, requires much more than cold, binary decision-making; it's also impacted by our moment-to-moment actions throughout the game. Take the following scenario: One of our crew members must rush through a burning factory to reach his assassination target in time, but the building is filled with people who could never escape the fire on their own. Do we stop to help the civilians knowing our teammate will blame us for failure, or do we proceed with the mission and simply let the innocent workers die?

"SAY THE WRONG THING AT THE WRONG TIME AND WE POTENTIALLY SABOTAGE A RELATIONSHIP."



Though perhaps not always as exciting as running into a flaming structure, the game's extensive conversation system also plays a major role in establishing the trust of our crew and shaping the narrative experience. With expertly written banter, seamless cutscenes for every dialogue option, and acting and direction that would make a Hollywood studio blush, *Mass Effect 2's* dialogue trees are an unparalleled example of powerful interactive storytelling.

But hidden within each engrossing exchange are dozens of subtle in-the-moment decisions that can have any number of

unperceived effects on the bigger picture. Say the wrong thing at the wrong time and we could potentially sabotage an entire relationship for the rest of the game. Either way though, we're practically guaranteed to witness entirely new scenarios with every playthrough.

Set Phasers to Fun

Of course, *Mass Effect 2* isn't all talk. Though it may be a story-heavy RPG at heart, it also packs an arsenal of third-person action. And whereas the original game could probably best be described as a role-playing game with guns, the sequel is undoubtedly a shooter. "The combat is just night and day better," Hudson states. "I think that's one thing that people are going to really appreciate on the PS3: It plays like a fantastic shooter, but you've got lots of tactical stuff in there as well."

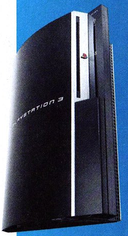
"We treated guns as gameplay," adds Houston. "If you get a new pistol, it's actually in firing it that you learn to appreciate it. It's not in terms of the stats. You're not comparing numerically. You'll pick based on how great they feel and how they sound and what they're doing to the enemy."

Our hands-on time proved BioWare right: The traditional aiming and movement controls felt tight, the over-the-shoulder camera withstood every enemy assault, and all of the now-standard shooter conventions—including a hard cover system, location specific damage, and regenerating health—were present and accounted for. The class-specific powers, upgradable special attacks, and the ability to essentially wield our two squadmates as weapons (by issuing quick-commands with the D-pad) even added an unexpected layer of depth and originality to the combat.

Naturally, the game also contains all the traditional trappings of an RPG: We begin the game by selecting our class, each of which offers a different set of abilities and weapon options. Shepard levels up as we gain experience (the rest of the crew automatically levels up with him) and we can purchase new armor, weapons, and upgrades with the resources we gather during missions or from mining with our ship. The inventory and upgrade systems have been drastically streamlined since the first game, but the multifaceted progression systems still run impressively deep.

Ultimately, however, story still rules the day. *Mass Effect 2's* breathtaking depth and ambitious approach to storytelling feel like one giant leap forward for the interactive medium. As gaming's defining space epic, it could easily earn a place alongside the greatest science fiction our pop culture has to offer.

EN MASS



The PS3 might be getting *Mass Effect 2* a bit late, but BioWare is working hard to give us the most complete version of gaming's definitive space epic.

For starters, we'll enjoy nearly $100 worth of additional content for *free.* All three major expansion packs and over a dozen smaller pieces of DLC—which altogether add up to approximately 20 hours of additional gameplay—will already be on the disc (or available as a free day-one download) and integrated seamlessly into the main campaign. The PS3 version also features three years' worth of engine updates and every patch released for the game, meaning issues that plagued the Xbox version have already been addressed.

More importantly, the developers promise they're not taking any shortcuts with the port. "Oftentimes when you go to PS3, you see stuff like down-resing and using a smaller than 720 resolution to try and get back some of the framerate," says executive producer Jesse Houston. "We haven't done that. We really wanted to try to make it as good, if not better than the Xbox version." He also mentioned something about "pumping the daylights out of the PS3," but we won't get into that.

Photos by Mark Madeo

The Art of Giving

How to win allies and influence colleagues this holiday season

Peace on earth, goodwill toward men?! Bah, if that worked we'd all be living in a freakin' utopia by now. But the right gift can change everything. PTOM's managing editor and gifting mastermind Roger Burchill reveals how a little strategic giving can pay dividends in the new year.

THE TASK

Deadlines—they're the bane of a managing editor's existence. Magazine staffs regard them as humorous jests or mere suggestions to be readily ignored. Game mag editors in particular seem impervious to traditional management methods: condemnation, public humiliation, beatings with nail-encrusted bats. No, only outright loot bribery works consistently. Sure it can be pricey, but that's what expense reports are for.

THE MASTERMIND

Success in management requires working smarter by having the staff work harder. Trinkets can keep the working class in line, while we reap the rewards.

THE TARGETS

The key to gift giving lies in understanding the psychology and behaviors of the prey—er, person—that the present is intended for. This usually requires extensive research and observation of the subject within its natural habitat, but we've conveniently compiled data on a broad range of personality types in the sidebar to the right. And if HR inquires: All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

THE TACTICS

A random PS3 title or a *Star Wars*-related product might seem the perfect gift for a game geek, but buying nerd gifts ain't like dusting crops, boy! Without precise calculations we might inadvertently buy a casual game, or remove a collectible from its original packaging, and that'd end your power trip real quick, wouldn't it? For maximum return for the gift-giving dollar, move beyond straightforward genre selections and meld the various affliated interests of the subject within a single present. *Star Trek* and pizza? We've got it covered. Soccer and *Star Wars*? Ditto. Next-gen third-person adventuring and megalomania? Did you even have to ask? So venture forth with us, watch and learn, and make your holiday gift-giving a much more fruitful endeavor.

THE SIDEKICK

Presentation is as important as the present. A gift delivered by our deadly and delightful designer Christin Chi has much more cachet.

THE SHUFFLER

He is the master of his geek domain, gladly shuffling over to our desk to tell us *all* about it.

INTERN X

She has a name, but is it worth remembering? Get her a gift in case it someday is.

EL PRESIDENTE

The man who controls our fate and livelihood—and who's quite handsome as well.

YOUNG GUN

Sooo passionate—so much so that he can't bear to part with his prose until it's perfect(?).

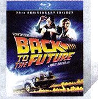
THE ARTIST

The managing editor's only natural predator. His wrath must be placated.

The Staples

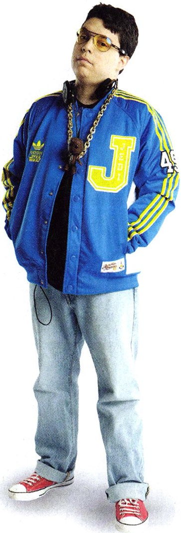
PS3
DEADRISING 2
CAPCOM

Dead Rising 2
$60 | Capcom
It's not just killing zombies, it's do-it-yourself projects for killing zombies.



Back to the Future Trilogy
$80 | Universal
The future seen through '80s-tinted lenses is more fun than the reality.

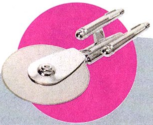
"Greg's disdain of Boba Fett is legendary but he loves delicious irony, so I softened him up with something I knew he'd hate. The classic reverse bait-and-switch."



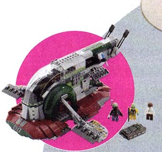
GREG'S BEST GIFTS EVAR

adidas Originals Star Wars SST Jedi Track Top $95; Mad Catz Call of Duty: Black Ops ProGaming Glasses $80; Astro Gaming A30 Headphones $130; Mezco LittleBigPlanet figure $10

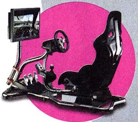
GREG'S GEEK GEAR



ThinkGeek's U.S.S Enterprise Pizza Cutter is so beautiful it'd make a Vulcan cry. $25



Yes, Greg, despite your protests Boba Fett is awesome, as is LEGO's Slave I kit. $80



The VisionRacer VR3 may well redefine what constitutes the ultimate driving machine. $999

Even Luke couldn't resist the power of Uncle Milton's Star Wars Science Frog Habitat. $35

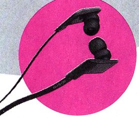
ANNE'S ACCESSORIES

Mimobot USB Flash Drives are super useful and super cute. $25

Sony's DualShock 3 is just so pretty in pink. $55

Hori's HD LCD Monitor transforms the PS3 into the ultimate on-the-go gaming rig. $250

PSP gaming never sounded better than with Astro Gaming's A*Star in-ear headsets. $80



"One may question the need to include the intern when gift giving, but there's always the unlikely chance she'll amount to something. A little investment now could pay loyalty dividends later."

NERF
N-STRIKE

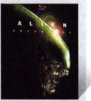
ANNE'S BEST GIFTS EVAR

Nerf N-Strike Stampede ECS $60; Gamedar hoodie $60 from gamedar.com

The Staples

PS3
DEAD SPACE 2
EA

Dead Space 2
$60 | EA
Aliens, lots of 'em, and not the touchy-feely friendly ones from the *Close Encounters* movie.



Alien Anthology
$140 | 20th Century Fox
In space no one can hear you scream, but in your living room...

"Keeping the boss man appeased is of prime importance, but keeping him distracted with toys is the secret to success."

GARY'S BEST GIFTS EVAR

Fuzion City Glide Scooter $50; Phosphor E Ink Digital Hour Clock Watch $185; adidas Originals Star Wars Hans Solo S.L. 72 Shoes $120

GARY'S TECH TOYS

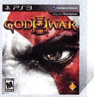
The AirHogs Hawkeye R/C Video Camera Helicopter is the perfect device for keeping tabs on the staff. $60

The trim on this adidas Originals Star Wars Chewbacca Coat perfectly matches Gary's flowning mane. $200

Be free of the tyranny of wires with the Logitech F540 Wireless Headset. $150

Sony's PS3 Surround Sound System is the simplist path to audio immersion. $200

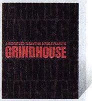
The Staples



God of War III

$60 | SCEA

Seeking to climb the corporate ladder? Try the Kratos Method for fast results.



Grindhouse Collector's Edition

$40 | Vivendi

A splendid collection of distracting action and short shorts.

"No one suffers from blown deadlines like the Art Director. Keeping active helps Ken relieve stress, which keeps him—and thus me—healthy."

KEN'S BEST GIFTS EVAR

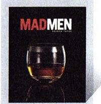
adidas Originals Star Wars Direct Football Track Top $85; adidas adiPURE Training Pro Ball $25; PUMA Plaid Fedora $28

The Staples

FIFA Soccer 11

$60 | EA Sports

This recreation of the beautiful game ranks as the best sports videogame available.



Mad Men: Season Three

$50 | Lionsgate

Tales of drinking and carousing while working. AKA the good ol' days.

KEN'S LOOT LOCKER

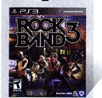
Nike Mercurial Glide TF Soccer Cleat. $85

These Nike Vintage '73 Air Attack Sunglasses will help Ken stay cool by looking cool. $99

Comfort and fashion collide in this PUMA Edition Kozyndan T-shirt. $35

If there's such a thing as bike pr0n, the PUMA Funk Bicycle is it. $885

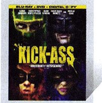
The Staples



Rock Band 3

$60 | EA/MTV Games

The hardest rocking music game can now teach you how to play the real thing.



Kick-Ass

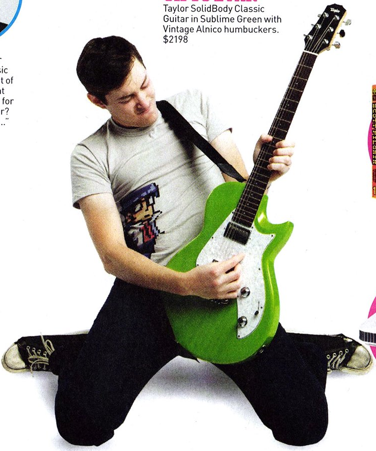
$40 | Lionsgate

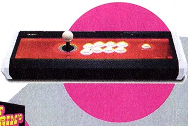
So young, so angry, so violent, but yes, the next generation of superheroes is so kick ass.

"Scott's our resident music man. Fresh out of college, what wouldn't he do for a $2000 guitar? Let's find out..."

SCOTT'S BEST GIFTS EVAR

Taylor SolidBody Classic Guitar in Sublime Green with Vintage Alnico humbuckers. $2198

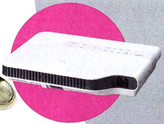




The Hori Real Arcade Pro.3 Premium VLX Fight Stick is so hardcore it verges on audacious. $300

Reading is fundamental: Scott Pilgrim Bundle Volumes 1-6. $72

SCOTT'S TRACK LIST



The Casio Green Slim Projector offers big-screen HD gaming goodness in a wafer-thin package. $799

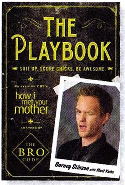
You haven't truly played *Rock Band 3* unless you've played it with Mad Catz's Wireless Keyboard. $80

THE STOCKING STUFFERS

Need fuel for the gaming fire? Jack Link's Matador Flamin' Hot Snack Sticks will provide the spicy spark you need. $2

Consider Splitfish's wireless FragFX Shark controller the great equalizer for console FPS players who crave the speed and accuracy of a PC mouse. $90

Call us crazy, but Wild Planet's DC Universe Squatz figures make us feel better by showing that superheroes have their fat days too. $10



We won't name names, but *The Playbook* is essential reading for some staffers. $13

Callpod's Chargepod ensures your PSP will never run out of juice, nor will your other devices. $50

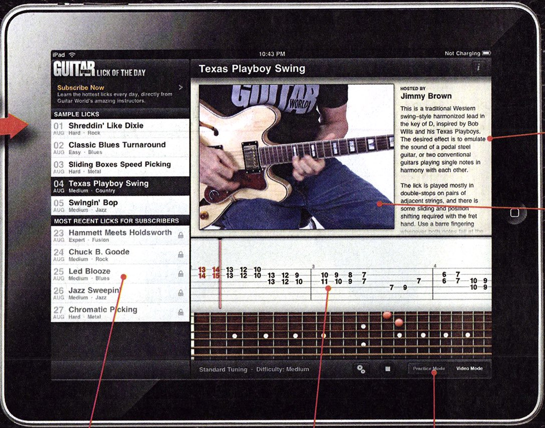
Your PS3 craves hot haute couture too. GelaSkins offers the latest fashions.$30

GUITAR WORLD LICK OF THE DAY

A MUST-HAVE APP FOR EVERY GUITARIST

from the brilliant minds at GUITAR WORLD and AGILE PARTNERS

OPTIMIZED FOR iPAD! – use it on the iPhone and iPod touch, too!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Video Mode

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- 04 AUG **Texas Playboy Swing** Medium · Country
- 05 AUG **Swingin' Bop** Medium · Jazz

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- 26 AUG **Jazz Sweepin'** Medium · Jazz
- 27 AUG **Chromatic Picking** Hard · Metal

Texas Playboy Swing

HOSTED BY
Jimmy Brown

This is a traditional Western swing-style harmonized lead in the key of D, inspired by Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys. The desired effect is to emulate the sound of a pedal steel guitar, or two conventional guitars playing single notes in harmony with each other.

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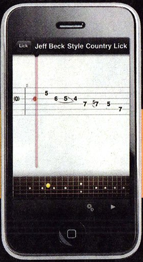

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70

NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT

Pursuit may not, by the laws of elemental physics, be able to get any hotter. Developer Criterion takes the reins here, and players can enjoy the furious chasing as cops or criminals.

PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Reviews

Your essential guide to new releases

War never changes.

Wrestling, on the other hand, changes with time and tide. It's like the circus, only with fewer clowns and more burly men whacking one another with steel chairs. This month, PTOM takes a critical look at both wrestling and war, not to mention Halloween, vehicle racing oftentimes resulting in pursuit bordering on the scorching, popular board games and horror films made into videogames, and a little thing we like to call scouring one's home for invisible—possibly Invizimal—monsters.

The Italian Stallion Rocky Balboa suggested we can all change, although it may have been the brain damage talking. And we're left wondering about change as it applies to videogames. Can a new series change the formula enough to supplant an established one in a beloved genre? Does the more a sequel changes mean it proportionally stays the same? What happens when an athlete changes sports, and someone makes a game of it?

Questions abound. But we're sure of change as the great motivator. It's made us think. And thinking is what we do here in this reviews section.

We won't change that. Promise.

COD: BLACK OPS

War never changes. But as done by *Call of Duty*, it just seems to get better and better. Heed now, dear reader, the call of the *Call of Duty* videogame review.

FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS

War never changes. It is, sometimes, very post-apocalyptic. Take a trip to the wasteland paradise of New Vegas, where the dice are hot, and the guns, loaded.

COSTUME QUEST

Remember those jerks who always gave out apples or pennies or pencils to trick or treaters for Halloween? Yeah, we hated their stinking guts, too. And no, we had no idea who egged their car.

How we score our reviews...

10 Awesome
Instant classic that's nearly PlayStation perfection.

9 Excellent
Highly recommended and a great investment.

8 Great
Wonderful yet still possessed of minor flaws.

7 Good
Enjoyable, but with definite room for improvement.

6 Acceptable
A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places.

5 Mediocre
A game that's both fun and frustrating in equal measure.

4 Flawed
Too flawed to be anything more than a curiosity.

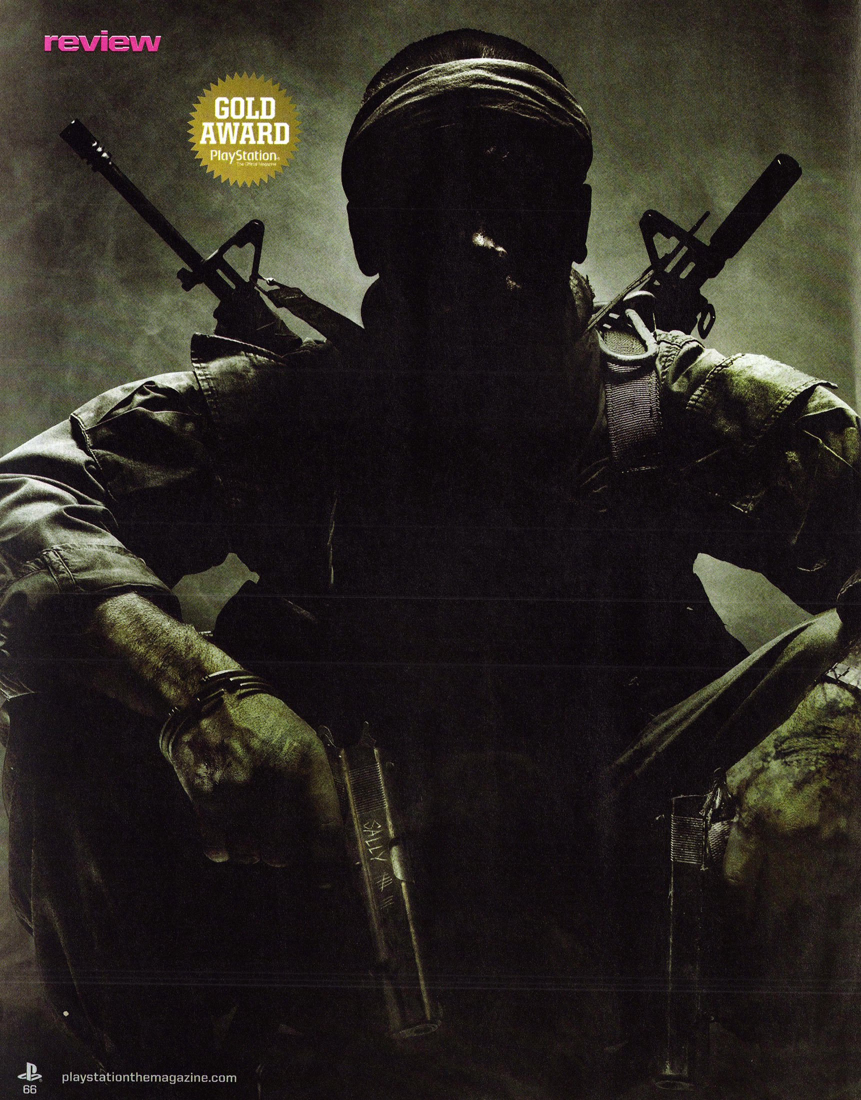
3 Poor
A seriously defective game with no long-term appeal.

2 Awful
A disgrace to the bargain bin. Avoid it like the plague.

1 Raw Sewage
Apparently, feces *can* be pressed on a disc.

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation

Our Highest Accolade
The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near flawless gameplay, great graphics, and profound appeal.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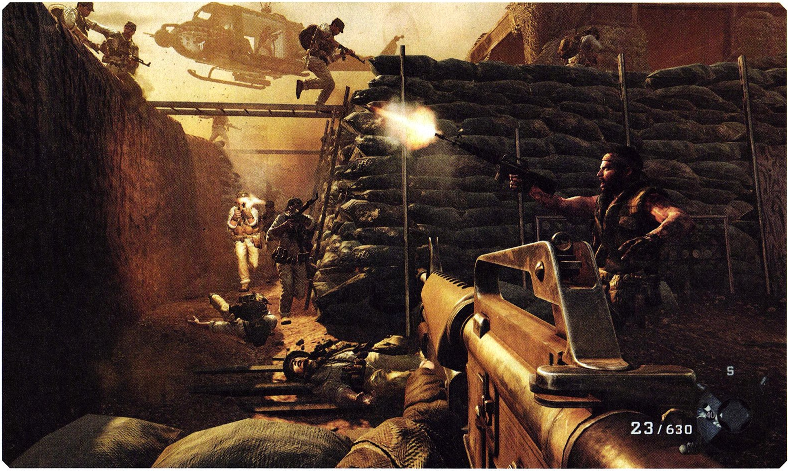


Call of Duty Black Ops

The Cold War gets that much cooler

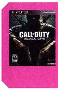
Our vision is hazy. "What is your name?!" A blinding white light burns our eyes as we try desperately to blink away the blurry images surrounding us. We're covered in blood. It's probably ours. Probably.

"Where were you born?!"

The distorted voice seems to come at us from all sides—deep, demanding, colored with a strange sense of urgency. We struggle against the coarse leather straps that bind us to an examination chair. Then we notice the wires attached to our chest and arms.

"Answer me!"

Just 30 seconds into the campaign and it's already clear: *Call of Duty: Black Ops* is decidedly different from any of its predecessors.



Info

Format PS3 **Pub** Activision **Dev** Treyarch **Price** $59.99 **ESRB** Mature **It's like** our own personal Vietnam flashback...in the best possible way.

The Dark Side

In contrast to *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2*—a breathless, modern-day terrorist rollercoaster careening toward certain nuclear annihilation with every outlandish twist—*Ops* explores the darker underbelly of the Cold War. By comparison, it's far more psychological. Whereas *Warfare 2* focuses on the events of a few short (and extremely dramatic) days, *Ops* revolves almost entirely around one very broken man: Alex Mason, an accomplished American soldier and former CIA operative.

Through a series of violent flashbacks, the story traces his turbulent military career across the 1960s—from the Bay of Pigs to the Tet Offensive and beyond—as he tracks a rogue Russian militant bent on developing an insidious new chemical weapon called Nova 6. It's a very personal tale that hits harder emotionally and goes places other *Call of Duty* games never could, leaning on Mason's obsession, paranoia, and deteriorating mental state to create mood and tension.

Duty 3D

Though we're still not convinced that 3D is the way of the future, *Black Ops* provides deep, well-executed 3D visuals for those with equipment and inclination to enjoy them. Stereoscopic!

It's also much grittier than any other game in the series. Imagine interrogating a man by shoving glass in his mouth and punching his face until he talks. That's not even as dark as it gets. But all that unflinching violence pays off: *Ops* is fresh without feeling forced, and maintains the intensity we've come to expect from *Call of Duty* while providing a deeper, more substantial narrative experience.

The plot becomes a little predictable and some of the supporting characters could have been more fully fleshed out, but the story is easily our favorite since the original *Modern Warfare* blew our minds.

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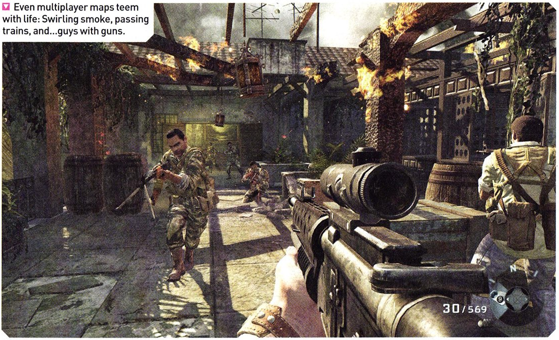


Even multiplayer maps teem with life: Swirling smoke, passing trains, and...guys with guns.

War Is Hell

Despite the Cold War-era narrative, the gameplay feels nearly identical to the modern-day combat of *Warfare 2*. Not that we're complaining. If anything, that's a massive compliment. The gameplay first laid out by the *Warfare* games helped establish *Call of Duty* as the world's most powerful interactive franchise, so for developer Treyarch to produce a game that matches that caliber is no small feat—even if it didn't always feel like we were knee deep in 'Nam or the Cold War.

All of the game's core mechanics are on par with anything superstar developer Infinity Ward ever created: The flawless aiming mechanics, the spot-on camera, the physical impact of every bullet, the consistently intelligent enemies—this is as close to first-person shooter perfection as we're likely to get. Plus, while the difference isn't dramatic, this is the best looking and best sounding *Duty* game to date. Environments explode with life, and the sound effects demonstrate a subtle attention to detail that's truly impressive.

Even more important than the brilliant mechanics, however, are all the exhilarating things *Ops* lets us do with them. From jumping off a cliff to escape an avalanche to legitimately piloting an attack chopper, there's such a wealth of memorable moments that we aren't too concerned about exposing a few of them here. And amazingly, it never felt like overkill—the game's meticulous pacing allows each moment to stand on its own.

Kills earned using kill streak bonuses no longer count toward the next bonus. This should help keep the rich from getting richer.

The gameplay between those discrete dramatic moments is varied and unique as well, offering a vast array of settings and situations—from stealthily swimming under huts in Vietnam to leading a massive prison uprising in Siberia. While it doesn't provide as many of the overwhelmingly chaotic battles that defined *Warfare 2*, its consistent creativity elevates *Ops* above the depressing legion of indistinguishable corridor shooters.

Unfortunately, *Ops* retains a few of *Warfare 2's* bad habits, such as infinitely spawning enemies and vague instructions. Other than one specific mission where both factors left us extremely frustrated, however, these issues didn't crop up often enough to bring down the eight-hour solo experience. The campaign's world-class gameplay, along with its richer, darker story, makes *Ops* well worth replaying.

Our Idea of Fun

And then there's the main event: multiplayer. Treyarch follows the classic formula much closer than it does with *Ops'* single-player, and the developer captures the experience perfectly. The addictive progression system that allows players to gain

5 Deaths Black Ops' most creative online killings

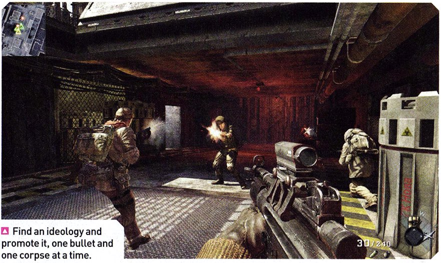
1 **You're Toast**
The "Launch" multiplayer map features a working rocket that totally barbequed us upon take off as we stood beneath it.

2 **Stupid Cupid**
The all-new crossbow features exploding arrows that let us kamikaze our attackers once they stuck us. Hilarious!

3 **It's a Gas**
The Nova 6 gas grenades not only blur vision and slow movement, they gradually chip away at health as well.

4 **Car Bomb**
Remember: derelict vehicles are more than just scenery. Damage them enough and they'll explode, taking out anyone nearby.

5 **Eaten By a Grue**
Black Ops is full of Easter Eggs. Really, really amazing Easter Eggs. Study the Trophy list carefully for a few hints.



Find an ideology and promote it, one bullet and one corpse at a time.

"*Black Ops* is the complete package."

Whether the targets are commies or zombies, *Black Ops* delivers shooting fun.

experience for everything from basic kills to ultra-specific ambient challenges remains firmly intact.

The fast-paced, hyper-competitive action can still be frustrating for newcomers who lack the gear and the skill to avoid being shot in the back repeatedly, but it's also easy to see how this series set the bar for player-vs.-player action. Taking out two vehicles and four opponents with a single grenade during a demolition match may have been the high point for us. And that was just one round of many.

There are a few key updates both longtime fans and series newcomers will appreciate. Treyarch has implemented a currency system allowing players to select their upgrades rather than simply take whatever the game gives them. Most items are locked until players reach a certain experience level, but this system gives create-a-class greater depth and players greater freedom to create a specific role for themselves on the battlefield. We wish we could preview items before we purchase them, but hey, cash comes easily enough so mistakes are usually short-lived.

Naturally, a slew of new items have been added as well, including weapons and weapon attachments (such as a crossbow and an under-barrel flamethrower) and new kill streak rewards—the runaway favorite being the RC-XD remote-controlled bomb on wheels. More importantly, the game contains 14 brand-new maps, all of which manage to be intricate but not overly complicated, offering a healthy mix of wide-open and close-quarters environments with no obvious bottlenecks. Top notch.

Cast List

THE BROKEN HERO

Mason
The unfortunate soldier whose memories we relive.

THE SUSPECT MENTOR

Resnov
Mason's seasoned but mysterious Russian ally.

THE GOOD COP

Woods
Mason's reliable partner on his trip to hell and back.

Full Metal Jacket

In addition to this robust foundation, Treyarch has added a staggering amount of additional (and completely worthwhile) content. Tops on our list is wager matches: These six-man free-for-alls come in four unique flavors and, much to our delight, eliminate character customization in favor of pure, accessible action. Everyone enters on a level playing field and competes under a very unique set of rules, and the results are *the* most addictive arcade-style fun we've had in years.

Then there's Treyarch's patented co-op Zombie mode, which pits up to four players against an endless zombie horde but allows them to purchase weapons and upgrades as they progress through the level. We would buy *Ops* just to play this mode—it's that fun. And topping everything off, there's also the experience-and-upgrade-free Bare Bones mode; the offline, bot-based combat training; the optional risk/reward contracts adding ambient objectives to multiplayer; and a seriously impressive theater mode that lets us record and play back our favorite online moments.

Black Ops is the complete package. With an impressive balance of new ideas, smart changes to the existing formula, and nearly flawless gameplay execution, it's arguably the best game in the *Call of Duty* series to date.

PlayStation
The Official Magazine
10

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

Police roadblocks can really put a damper on recreational speeding.

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation The Official Magazine

Need For Speed Hot Pursuit

Speed is no longer a need, it's the right of every gamer

Info

Format PS3
Pub Electronic Arts
Dev Criterion Games
Price $59.99
ESRB Everyone 10+
It's like *Burnout*, but with playable police cruisers.

Normally this is the part where we'd say, "Racing fans are in for a real treat." The reality is, it's *everyone else* who'll be blindsided by how easy *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit* is to pick up and play for an eternity. It's far less concerned with being impressive, and instead puts being *awesome* as its top priority. Criterion, shepherd of the *Burnout* series has brought its bombastic, all-inclusive finesse and transplanted it into a *Need For Speed* game that succeeds at damn near everything it tries. It's consistently challenging without feeling difficult. It's immensely rewarding without ever being taxing.

Cops and racers: It's almost as simple as that. However, the ability to switch seamlessly back and forth creates an incredible amount of variation above and beyond time trials, races for pole position, and police-sanctioned takedowns. And there is literally nothing else quite like a Hot Pursuit event, where cops and racers square off on a gorgeous California-esque track. It's easily the most fun event type in the game, and unlike anything we've played on PS3 before.

Playing as either side offers its own advantages, and bounty (experience points) earned is split only between the two classes. Cops accelerate a bit quicker and their nitrous boost charges the faster they move. The fuzz can call in roadblocks, and even a helicopter, to lay out spike strips up ahead to stop wheelmen in their tracks. Meanwhile, racers have radar jammers and can use shortcuts to shave off time and hide from their pursuers.

Hot Pursuit's sense of speed is energizing, and there's always

5 Ways Hot Pursuit takes down Gran Turismo

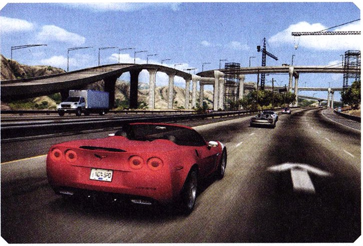
1 **No Crap Cars**
Some folks enjoy tuning the suspension of a 1975 Datsun hatchback. We'll wager most people do not.

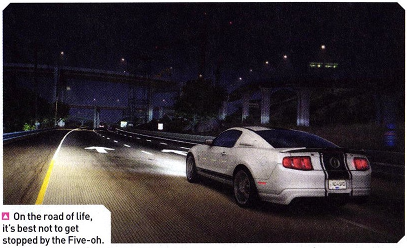
2 **Crashing Is Fun**
We don't just have a need for speed, we have a need for destruction. *Hot Pursuit* has this covered, big time.

3 **Drift**
Hot Pursuit gives every car the ability to drift around corners with one of the most intuitive mechanics ever.

4 **Make a Match**
With the Autolog feature, we no longer have to toil online with somebody we'll never beat, nor suffer annoying racers.

5 **Screenshots**
Don't just rub victory in a friend's face, take a picture of it and post it on his Autolog wall for all to see! That's what friends are for.





On the road of life, it's best not to get stopped by the Five-oh.

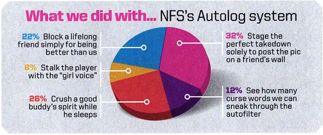
ProTip: It's not a good idea for speeders to ask a public servant with a gun to get them a glass of water.

something to do, some trick to perform to allow for more speed. *Burnout* fans shouldn't have any trouble charging their nitrous supplies, as the principles are fundamentally the same: Near misses, driving (safely) into oncoming traffic, and feathering the gas and braking into showstopping drifts all puts juice in the nitrous tanks.

There Is No Blue Shell

Hot Pursuit is armed to the gills with destructive weaponry, but unlike other games, they're not divvied out in a manner that levels the playing field. Instead, weapons reward clever drivers by enhancing each and every wildly slick variation of Lamborghini, Corvette, and Porsche (among others) that already come well equipped to win every race.

Spike strips ruin tires, invisible missiles of electromagnetic devastation temporarily shut down engines, and turbo can be employed with all the ramming grace of a pissed-off bull. But luck doesn't enter into the equation, as it does in other driving games. These weapons don't litter *Hot Pursuit's* tracks. Instead, each match typically starts with a loadout of up to four weapons that can't be fired off in rapid succession. Races can take a while—and on those few occasions when we were taken down inches before the finish line, we took solace in the fact that somebody held onto a weapon for a *long* time.



What we did with... NFS's Autolog system

Best Race on the 'Net

Offline racing is only half the experience. That's quite a bold move on Criterion's part, since most online racers have left a helluva lot to be desired. But *Hot Pursuit* is like Racing 2.0, and even those who don't have 100-plus hours to invest into being the best will have oodles of dynamic challenges to surmount online. The game's Autolog system recommends events based on records friends have set with their cars and tracks—meaning a player can even compete with a buddy on the other side of the world without ever actually entering a server together. Autolog is *Hot Pursuit's* own version of Facebook, letting players post pics or times on other players' walls. The system keeps track of every victory, loss, and time set, even when playing offline.

As good as Criterion was with doling out consistent DLC for *Burnout Paradise*, the Autolog Recommendations virtually guarantee new challenges for as long as people keep playing. Much like *Paradise, Hot Pursuit* strikes a perfect balance between hardcore racing thrills and arcade multiplayer fun that anyone can enjoy. For any gamer in hot pursuit of an addictive racing title that offers significant replay value online and off: Your ride has arrived.

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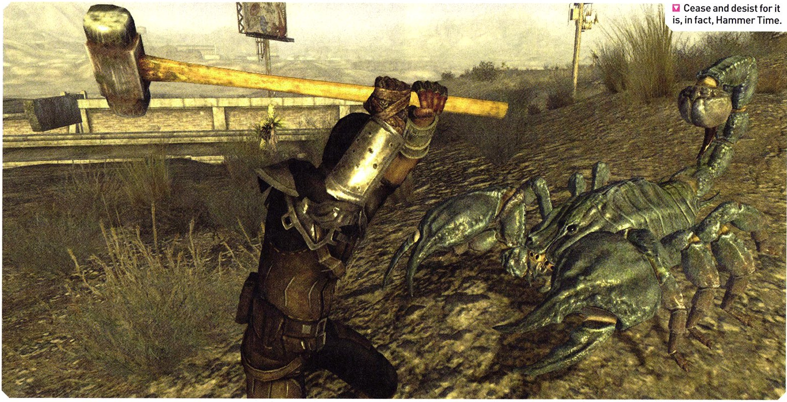
10

CHRIS ANTISTA



Cease and desist for it is, in fact, Hammer Time.

Fallout New Vegas

A post-nuclear Western with Rat Pack cool

Subtitling this game *New Vegas* is a touch misleading. True, a rebuilt, post-apocalyptic version of Las Vegas is at the center of this sprawling adventure. But for much of the game, New Vegas remains a glittering city glimpsed in the distance, visible but untouchable, and before the action finally moves there, players are dragged through a complicated revenge story beginning with the protagonist, a wasteland courier, shot in the head and buried alive.

The quest for revenge takes players on a winding path through the Mojave wasteland—a vast, bombed-out Nevada desert filled with seemingly hundreds of towns, caves, and other places to discover and explore. It's also home to numerous conflicts, whether between escaped prison gangs and townsfolk or between the enormous New California Republic and the sadistic Roman-inspired Legion. And part of what makes those conflicts interesting is that the solutions are seldom as obvious or as rigid as one might think.

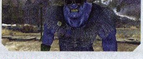
Fallout: New Vegas is fundamentally similar to *Fallout 3*—same engine, same shooter/RPG hybrid gameplay, same V.A.T.S. auto-targeting system to make combat less clumsy. Much of the game is similarly spent trekking on foot through a vast wasteland, splattering predatory mutant horrors with a broad range of weaponry. But unlike *Fallout 3,* this game was developed by Obsidian, a company made up largely of refugees from Black Isle Studios—*Fallout's* original developer. As a result, this often feels like a truer *Fallout* sequel than *3* did, and not just because of all the *Fallout 2* callbacks and references.

Info

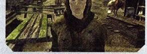
PS3
Fallout
NEW VEGAS
M

Format PS3
Pub Bethesda Softworks
Dev Obsidian Ent.
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like *Fallout 3* with more nuance and more gambling.

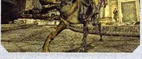
Our favorite followers Because the Mojave's a dangerous place alone



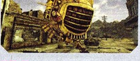
LILY BOWEN
Stealth-powered supermutant and the wasteland's greatest grandma.



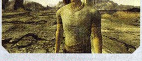
VERONICA SANTANGELO
Brotherhood of Steel scribe voiced by Felicia Day.



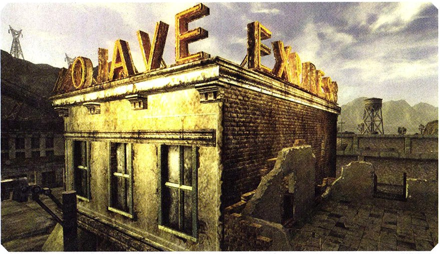
REX
Friendly cyberdog in need of a new brain.



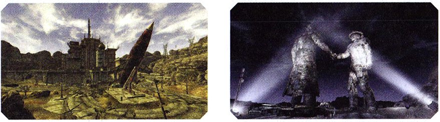
ED-E
Floating robot with a mysterious past.



CRAIG BOONE
Lethal sniper on a vendetta against Caesar's Legion.



Bright light city may well set players' souls on fire.



Rockets tend to crash a lot less than *Fallout: New Vegas.*

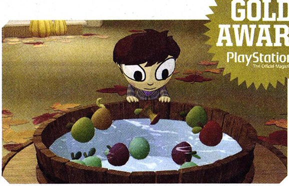
Roll the Dice

The game's numerous moral decisions are less about good-vs.-evil and more about trying to pick the best option from several bad ones. Frequently, these decisions are tied to the various political factions who've carved up the Mojave, which range from gangs to townships to armies—and players need to cultivate a relationship with each. This means loyalties need to be weighed, and the story can progress differently depending on the decisions made. There's also a much bigger focus this time on secondary characters; a handful can be recruited from across the wasteland, and most come with lengthy backstory-heavy quests and endearing personalities.

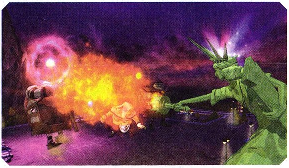
Vegas is tied together by some stellar writing and an increasingly more fascinating plot, thanks to some very *BioShock*-like twists. But there's one thing holding *Vegas* back: It's buggy as hell. Slowdown, glitches, and even crashes are common; it's inexcusable in what's supposed to be a finished game. (Also, including an hour's worth of licensed Rat Pack and country tunes in a game that runs 80-plus hours does the soundtrack no favors.) Bear with its flaws, however, and this is one of the most involving adventures since *Mass Effect.* MIKEL REPARAZ

PlayStation The Official Magazine **8**

GOLD AWARD PlayStation The Official Magazine



Apple bobbing: Sometimes, as with life, the kid gets worms.



Costume Quest

Candied camera

Info

Format PSN
Pub THQ
Dev Double Fine Productions
Price $14.99
ESRB Everyone 10+
It's like a trick and a treat. In one!

A cute Halloween-themed adventure, the downloadable *Costume Quest* offers candy and monster smiting in equal measure. Its goofiness proves endearing and the game itself is a sugary delight.

Quest presents a cartoonish world owned and operated, at least for one night, by children. Gameplay blends elements of action- and role-playing games, turn-based combat, and puzzle solving. Its world demands trick-or-treating, bobbing for apples, and the collection of materials to allow for the creation of shoddy Halloween costumes.

During combat, the costumes transform into the genuine article: ninja, Statue of Liberty, etc. It's pure, workmanlike homage to *Final Fantasy X-2's* dress up feature—complete with three-man teams and exaggerated special attacks—but the sequences are easily dispatched so players can return to the fun in short order. Exploration equals adventure, with the heroes racing like the wind on rocket skates, scouring sewers, and unlocking the secrets of a mall, all the while being bombarded with cheeriness and assaulted by someone's good humor. Someone remembers mischievous fun, and captured it in this 10-hour confection. Bravo.

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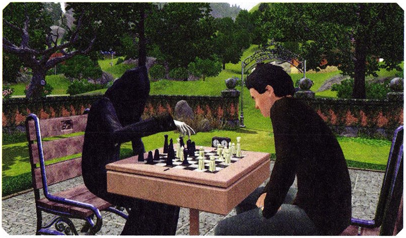
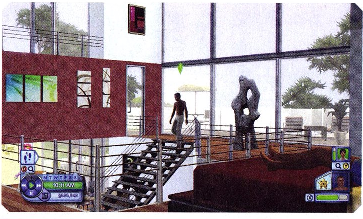
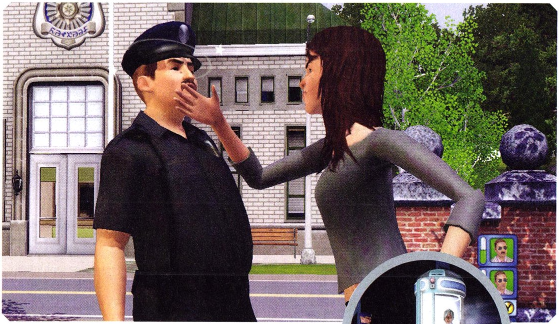
GREG ORLANDO





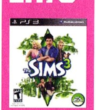
Players earn karma for completing tasks and then spend that karma to help their sims or punish other sims. And, of course, there is a reckoning.



The Sims 3

My so-called (simulated) life

Info



Format PS3
Pub Electronic Arts
Dev Sims Studio
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like an oddly compelling exaggeration of the mundane.

The maid is staring at the wall while the simulated human astronaut-in-training MC Gripesalot is sleeping. There's a meteor rock in the living room and the clock is creeping toward midnight—the hour when karma has its reckoning, by which it is meant the wheel of fate is about to roll over someone but good.

Electronic Arts' little computer people simulation *The Sims 3* offers a compelling so-called life, one fraught with perils and whimsy. Players can create these simulated humans (thus named sims), buy them a house, get them jobs, and take them through the minutiae of everyday existence. Its magic is inexplicable; as with all its console and PC-brethren, *Sims 3* manages to make the mundane fascinating, morphing what should be a dangerously boring experience into something addictive.

Sims are burdened with a ton of goals and options: an empty house wants a bed; place to sit; machinery for cooking, bathing, and the removal of bodily wastes. Sims want TVs, computers, cars, bookshelves, weight machines—and none of this comes cheap, so it's the drudgery of the workaday world that requires Johnny Punchclock to improve his skills to scratch his way up the ladder. And a world waits outside the sims' homes, one filled with fishing holes, swimming pools, stadiums, restaurants, and mausoleums.

Managing the day becomes at once a great frustration and preeminent challenge. Although the sims can function autonomously, their behavior when not directed is more goofus than gallant, and the house, as it were, can only stand so much burning. More to the point, the sims have no sense of time in relation to anything else; they cook when the car has arrived to take them to work and do dishes when they're ready to pass out. Further, *The Sims* as a series has always misrepresented—oftentimes by a gross margin—the amount of time it takes to complete a task or chore. Cooking something as simple as pancakes requires a full hour for a chef whose skills have been expertly cultivated, and a sim will urinate for four minutes longer than any real human ever could. This, then, is maddening.

Role-playing elements and a bizarre karma system lubricate the works, and it's easy to get sucked into completing one more challenge, getting one more promotion before quitting a session. This is *The Sims'* great strength and it's possible to forgive the game for its menu-heavy presentation because, well, it just wants people to live a crazy, well-informed (simulated) existence. **GREG ORLANDO**

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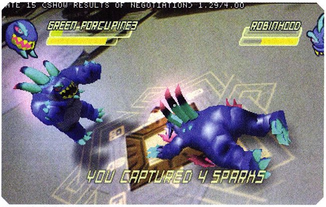
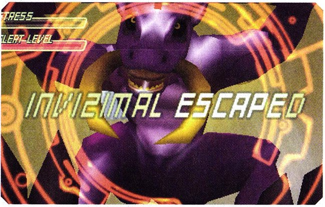


Invizimals requires players to capture their own monsters by using a camera and then pit these monsters against one another.



Invizimals

No wonder we're all itchy

Info

Format PSP **Pub** SCEA
Dev Novarama **Price** $39.99
ESRB Everyone **It's like** proof that we weren't crazy when insisting that invisible bugs were crawling on us.

The 10-year-old in us can't help but be enamored by a game that transforms the PSP into the functional equivalent of a *Star Trek* tricorder.

Invizimals supposes tiny invisible creatures infest our real-world environments. By attaching the supplied camera to a PSP, we can scan the couch, behind curtains, inside sock drawers, our dirty underwear...er, basically anywhere we can conceive. Once the PSP's Geiger-counter-esque emanations locate a critter, we can lay down our trap to capture our monstrous minion-to-be.

The notion from there on out is pure Pokémon: Try to collect 'em all and train the menagerie for battle. But it's the way players interact with their creatures that sets *Invizimals* apart. Every new-age control trick, from accelerometer to gesturing to even whistling, is utilized to control and cajole 3D representations of the Invizimals as they're projected into the actual surrounding environment.

We wish *Invizimals'* gameplay were as innovative as its use of the PSP hardware; it's functional but offers limited variety beyond discovering the wow factor of superattacks as they're acquired. And the cheesy in-game videos, while informative, are rife with bad acting—but that's the jaded gamer in us. The 10-year-old kid in us just got the coolest gadget ever and can't wait to get back to finding every one of the 120-plus Invizimals. **ROGER BURCHILL**

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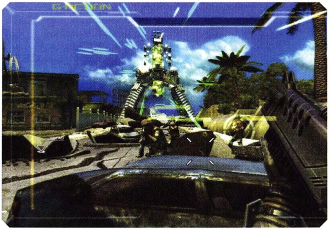
Reinforcements are on their way!
Hold things down until they get here!



Time Crisis Razing Storm

Shoot now, ask questions later

If *Time Crisis: Razing Storm* teaches us anything, it's that there is no such thing as too many killer robots.

Many might recognize *Razing Storm* from the arcade, but players don't need prior experience with the other *Time Crisis* games, arcade or otherwise, in order to delve into the story of an elite Delta Team as they track down a dangerous terrorist. But honestly, the story really isn't important. What is important are the ridiculous enemies and the kickass weapons, ranging from assault rifles to the Bolero gun (which reminds us of a chargeable cannon one might find on a pirate ship from the future).

The game is PlayStation Move compatible, which recreates the arcade-feel more so than previous console iterations. The actual arcade game is one of the modes offered, along with the prison break-themed Sentry mode and the Online Battle mode.

As a bonus, the disc also includes the arcade versions of *Time Crisis 4* and *Deadstorm Pirates*, which is highly entertaining if only for the fact that the main characters talk about their golden guns every two minutes.

Time Crisis: Razing Storm is a great game for those who are in the mood for something quick and full of—and we cannot stress this enough—giant robots complete with lasers and rockets. What else in life really matters? **ANNE LEWIS**

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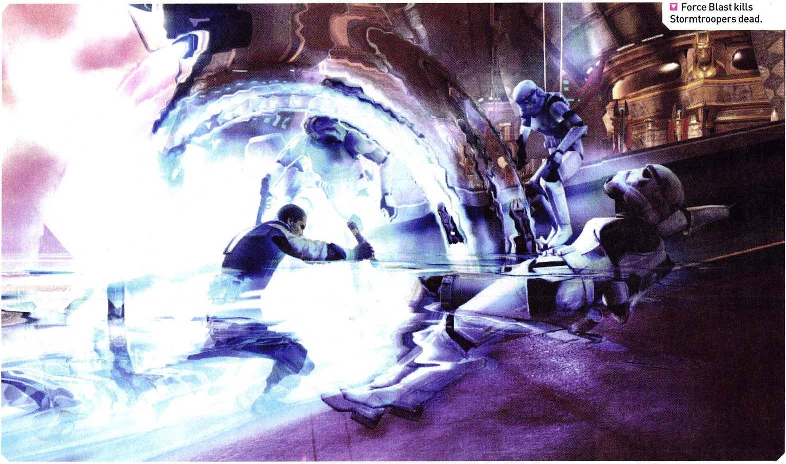
Info

Format PS3
Pub NamcoBandai
Dev Namco Bandai
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like the arcade games we already know and love.



Force Blast kills Stormtroopers dead.

Star Wars The Force Unleashed II

A true Jedi does not buttons mash

It turns out that Starkiller, Darth Vader's all-powerful secret apprentice from the original *Force Unleashed,* is alive and well after all. But is he a Jedi clone (as Vader says) or the same person? Or...both? And what are the implications for his love life?

Identity is a strong underlying theme throughout *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II,* but for all the hullabaloo made of our hero's Faustian quest of self-discovery, the truth is *Force II* is way more arcade-action shooter than space-opera adventure.

That's not a bad thing, though. This is a tense, fast-paced romp producing a few genuinely jaw-dropping moments. It's easily the best-looking and sounding *Star Wars* game of all time, and one of the best looking games we'll see this year on PS3.

Feel the Force

As with the first game, we hacked and slashed our way through thousands of stormtroopers, Mini ATs, lightsaber-wielding assassins, and more. There are fewer types of enemies than in the first game and the artificial intelligence is standard fare for grunts, but the game's designers compensate by combining these threats in some devilish ways, forcing us to consider a greater strategy. During big set battles, which can involve 20-plus grunts and a few bigger mini-bosses, we found ourselves manically mowing down Stormtroopers, electrocuting flying troopers, and deflecting incoming missiles in rapid succession. There are moments and sequences—such as the battle against Darth Vader—that left us sweating.

Using the Force is pretty awesome and feels authentic. Standard push-and-grab powers are supplemented with lightning, Jedi mind tricks, and more. As players succeed, they can level up these powers; at the most advanced levels, the powers become potent indeed—a powered-up Force Blast can destroy more than 10 Stormtroopers at a time. The crystals in Starkiller's lightsabers can also be swapped to produce extra health, faster Force regeneration, and more.

Info

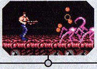
Format PS3
Pub LucasArts
Dev LucasArts
Price $59.95
ESRB Teen
It's like *Star Wars* meets *God of War.* Anger management seminar required.

Influences Traces of Light and Dark

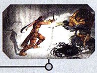
Metal Gear Solid's Die-Restart-Die

SOTC's mega-boss battles

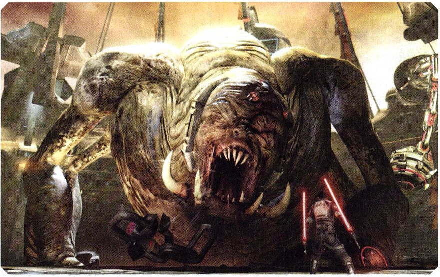
God of War's mass slaughter



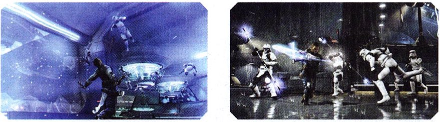
Contra's platform flip-jumping



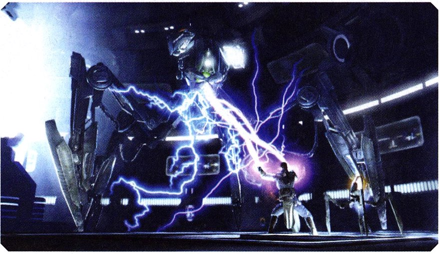
Prince of Persia's fluid combat



Today on Oprah: Throw things in my gigantic maw as I am hungry and have not eaten in 10 minutes.



Starkiller is on a quest to reunite with his girlfriend. Stabbing ensues.



Boss and mini-boss battles punctuate play, and while we found ourselves wishing there were more of them, they provide some great moments and a few surprising twists. These bigger battles involve a simultaneously entertaining and frustrating blend of dexterity, timing, puzzle solving...and dying.

The game's only real problem—and it's a doozy—are the controls: They're surprisingly unpolished. Combat feels mushy and lacks the crispness of similar games such as *God of War*, at least partially because of Starkiller's long, uninterruptible animations. It's too easy to make one attack too many, leaving Starkiller vulnerable as he combos off in the wrong direction. It's also difficult to lock onto and Force Grab objects and enemies. The timing for deflecting incoming missiles and laser fire feels arbitrary. And the controls for jumping feel frustratingly loose.

Still, *Force II* is an entertaining jaunt with enough great moments to be memorable. *Star Wars* fanatics and the under-15 crowd will particularly love it. GEORGE JONES

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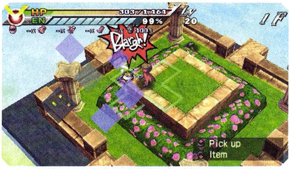

Darkdeath Evilman: There is no greater name for a villain.

Z.H.P. Unlosing Ranger VS Darkdeath Evilman

Turning into a hero

Info

Format PSP
Pub NIS America
Dev Nippon Ichi
Price $29.99
ESRB Teen
It's like *Rogue*, of course.

Call *Z.H.P.: Unlosing Ranger VS Darkdeath Evilman* "roguelike." Years ago there was a game for UNIX mainframes called *Rogue*, see, and its descendants are all kind of like it. In other words, it's a turn-based dungeon-exploring game. *Evilman* is only so much like any of those, though, because Nippon Ichi Software has never been big on conventional characters and stories. Instead of some faceless fantasy warrior, *Evilman* stars a kid in an alley who becomes a cartoon hero after the previous hero gets hit by a truck.

The "dungeon" is not actually a dungeon. It's the monster-filled training facility on counter-Earth, where our not-quite-hero has to grind away before he's tough enough to go back and take down Darkdeath Evilman. He does all the usual roguelike stuff—kill monsters, grab loot, gain levels, learn skills, repeat until obscenely powerful—but the crackpot gags and creative 3D stage designs lift the total experience to a much higher level. Think of it as the roguelike version of NIS's *Disgaea* or *Prinny* games, complete with a similar snarky style, unlikely characters, and slightly cruel sense of humor. DAVID F. SMITH

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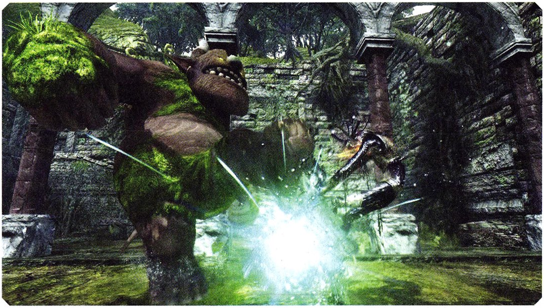
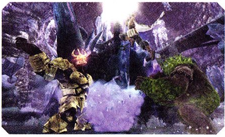
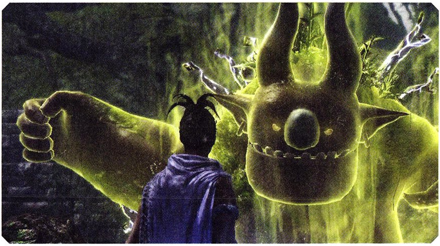




▲ Upgrade the monstrous Majin and he can clean an enemy's clock with a wind gust.

Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom

Pretty-boy and the beast



It's unfortunate Game Republic is now associated with the movie-tied mess *Clash of the Titans* rather than the under-the-radar *Folklore.* Its latest effort, the inspired if unpolished *Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom,* will hopefully garner the developer some due respect. Blending combat, puzzling, and exploration, *Majin* overcomes its few shortcomings with inventive cooperative play highlighting the central characters' appealing relationship.

Majin's co-op isn't of the usual two-players-on-a-couch variety; this is strictly a solo experience, where players control protagonist Tepeu while issuing commands to his titular beastie buddy. Tackling puzzles and battling baddies is a team effort, utilizing the unique skills of both characters. The former task can grow tedious, but the latter is a highlight, as Tepeu—armed with a sword-meets-Keyblade staff—beats back hordes of inky-black menaces while the hulking Majin faces more formidable foes. Balancing both warriors' strengths and weaknesses delivers a tension-driving mix of thumb-numbing action and brain-taxing strategizing. Even cooler, the game's many boss battles yield a satisfying sense of accomplishment.

As the heroes delve deeper into the lush, crumbling kingdom, the rewarding combat continues to evolve. Tepeu's upgrades—such as a strength boost—are standard stuff, but Majin's significantly up the ass-whuppin' ante. He can chain screen-clearing electrical attacks, exhale powerful wind gusts, and barbecue bad guys by spitting a mouth full of flames. Sure, we've saved the world with similar attacks in countless other titles but, thanks to the dynamic teamplay, they're given a fresh spin here.

Puzzles also benefit from these skills, but don't quite deliver the same punch when, say, Majin's fire-breathing ability is ultimately reduced to a glorified obstacle-eliminating key. And while there are a plenty of clever puzzles, there's also lots of crank-turning, pressure plate-squatting, and lever-pulling going on in this cursed kingdom.

Visually, *Majin* generally succeeds in immersing in its fantastical setting, even tossing in a gradual day/night cycle for variety. Unfortunately, some muddy texture work and repetitive asset use force it a few notches below this generation's best efforts. The story is typical evil-consumes-the-land fare, but it's saved by the genuinely moving relationship between the two characters. Sure, Tepeu occasionally comes off as a Prince of Persia-wannabe, but Majin makes up for it with his quirky appeal and huggable charm—and together they're a refreshing break from all the zombies and terrorists lurking around this holiday season. MATT CABRAL

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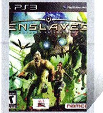
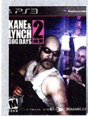
Like This? Play these



Enslaved: Odyssey to the West

Ninja Theory's latest is more about coordinated teamwork than *Ico*-like escort missions.

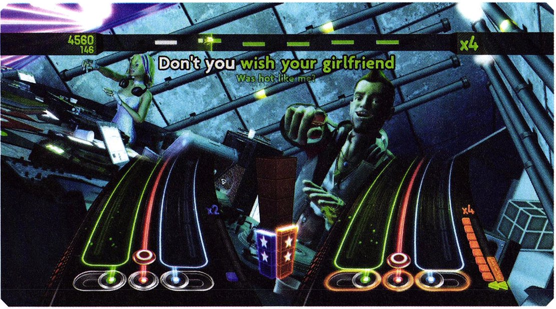


Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days

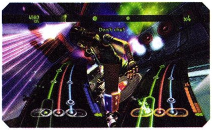
There's not too much going on in this ultraviolent game. But hop online with a friend to experience brutal mayhem.

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** Namco Bandai **Dev** Game Republic **Price** $59.99 **ESRB** Teen **It's like** having a personal bodyguard…that can breathe fire.



We're real worldwide
x4



The presentation feels very simple and useable—a pleasant change from *Guitar Hero's* overbearing interface.

Keep it cool
REWIND LOST
REWIND STOLEN
x4

DJ Hero 2

Let's get ready to remix

DJ Hero's **turntable controller hasn't changed, so loyalists don't need to buy another peripheral.**

We have to admit, reviewing *DJ Hero 2* felt like a bit of a vacation. As much as we love guitar-based rhythm games like *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero, DJ Hero's* fundamentally different approach to the genre provided a welcome relief from our steady diet of candy-colored buttons. Though not a great deal has changed between the original and the sequel, the game's approach remains fresh and fun, and the new content enhances the experience.

Every track here still consists of a mashup of two popular songs, and players must not only match scrolling notes in time with the music but also crossfade between the tracks, throw in samples and effects, scratch on cue, and at higher difficulty levels, tackle more advanced maneuvers such as directional scratching and crossfade spikes. But that's just the start. Now players can scratch, crossfade, and sample freely in the all-new freestyle sections. Considering the creative nature of DJ culture, the basic idea makes so much sense it hurts, and although the results don't always sound authentic, freestyling still adds a new layer of variety and immersion.

Hero 2's gameplay isn't perfect, though. We could never quite figure out how to consistently end a scratch without breaking our note streak, and the transition from medium to hard left us flailing. A few more in-depth tutorials and some individualized feedback would have helped a great deal. Still, nothing can compete with the total satisfaction of jumping between the effects knob and crossfader in perfect time with the beat or the incredible variety of techniques built into *Hero 2's* intense rhythmic multitasking. Even the medium difficulty setting proved to be a satisfying mix of challenge and reward.

Hero 2's other major addition is Empire mode, a slightly more structured career mode adopting *Guitar Hero's* "earn stars to unlock venues" approach. Naturally, the career itself ends up feeling a little empty—especially since we can't even customize our own DJ—but we love that every venue opened with a mashup megamix. Being thrown straight into the gameplay always felt like a party, though we wish Euphoria (read: Star Power) carried over between songs.

Empire mode also introduces the new and undeniably awesome DJ Battles. These head-to-head "boss battles" feature special mixes emulating the call-and-response nature of a really taut DJ showdown, so unlike *Guitar Hero's* gimmicky, annoying boss battles, these don't kill the immersion. If anything, they enhance the fantasy of being a real-live DJ while simultaneously providing a brief reprieve from the usual star harvesting. Fortunately, DJ Battles are relegated to Empire mode: Players can pick fights with their friends as well, battling online or side-by-side, or enjoy a few other generic, but not unwelcome, multiplayer modes.

And though it should go without saying, *Hero 2's* custom-created soundtrack is an absolute triumph. Thanks to the expertise of artists such as Deadmau5 and DJ Qbert, nearly every single track blasts infectious beats successfully combining everything from Lady Gaga to the Jackson Five. Since rhythm games are, in part, just another way to enjoy music, we're overjoyed *Hero 2's* gameplay still feels fresh enough that we can enjoy its world-class mashups.

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

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Guest List

DJ QBERT
The Bay Area's finest appears as the first DJ Battle opponent.

DEADMAU5
The game introduces this mysterious Canadian mix master as...an android?

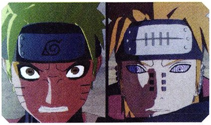
RZA
New York-based rapper/producer/ Wu-Tang Clan member also shows up for a battle.

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** Activision
Dev FreeStyleGames **Price** $59.99
ESRB Teen **It's like** being the life of party...we assume.

Naruto
Pain

Sasuke
75
Naruto



▲ ProTip: For would-be ninjas, start with learning martial arts, and not the headband.

▼ A ninja wearing orange in broad daylight? Hmm...

Naruto
Pain

Naruto Shippuden
Ultimate Ninja Storm 2

Full of fan service and fighting spirit

Info

Format PS3
Pub Namco Bandai
Dev CyberConnect2
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like ultimate anime overload with our favorite ninja of ninjas.

Not already following the *Naruto* anime or manga series? Then *Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm 2* might not be the best place to begin. Fans of the gutsy ninja and his never-give-up fighting philosophy, on the other hand, won't be disappointed.

Storm 2's epic story mode is the meatiest part of the game, taking players on a whirlwind tour through the best battles and most dramatic plot points in the *Naruto Shippuden* story arc. It begins with Naruto's return to his hometown of Konoha after training with his master, Jiraiya—and presses onward, all the way to the young ninja's final confrontation with Pain. The voice work is excellent with the original voice actors reprising their roles from the anime—and the visuals are drop-dead gorgeous. *Storm 2's* cel-shaded characters burst through with stunning detail, vibrant colors, and fluid motion.

Boss battles are especially impressive. Mixing in quick-time events during key moments, they had us racing to input the correct button combinations while the characters perform their signature finishing attacks with a cinematic flair that rivals the best battle scenes from the *Shippuden* anime and films. And all the best and most memorable confrontations are here. We kept Kakashi on his toes when facing off against his former master with Naruto and Sakura. We battled Deidara as Gaara while racing over the rooftops of the Hidden Sand Village. Even side characters from the series get their moment in the spotlight; expect to play through some particularly memorable moments with Team 10's Shikamaru and Asuma.

Storm 2's excellent character animation is matched by its beautiful environments. Each area is brought to life in detail through a series of painted backdrops. That includes the streets of Konoha, the Hidden Sand Village, the Rain Village, Orochimaru's hideout, and even Mount Myoboku, where Naruto trains to master his Sage mode technique.

In many ways, however, *Storm 2's* beauty is only skin deep. As gorgeous as it is, the Story mode features way too much backtracking. All the tiresome running back and forth between battle events feels like the game equivalent of anime filler, causing the Story mode to lose its momentum every time players complete an exciting battle.

Serious fighting fans will also be disappointed with the lack of balance and variety between the game's 40 playable characters, who all use the exact same control schemes. This makes the 1-vs-1 and online fighting modes feel like a small footnote after battling through the lengthy Story mode. But these minor shortcomings pale in comparison to the amount of fan service *Storm 2* delivers, hitting Naruto fanatics in all the right places. TYLER NAGATA

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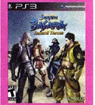
Sengoku Basara Samurai Heroes

Please don't call them Dynasty Warriors

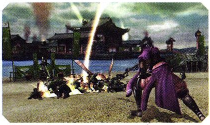
Info



Format PS3
Pub Capcom
Dev Capcom
Price $39.99
ESRB Teen
It's like fight, kill, repeat, fight, kill, repeat, and repeat again and again.

Every once in a while there is a game that haunts us in our sleep. *Sengoku Basara: Samurai Heroes* is one of those games.

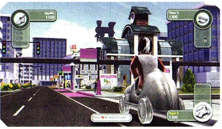
The nightmare begins when we choose a character and invade other camps to conquer or ally with different groups. This process is repeated until we feel like if we have to murder one more person, we will smash our controllers and give them a Viking funeral. Occasionally we're allowed a break from this relentless attack-and-conquer style and have the opportunity to defend our own base or fight against a strange new enemy—including the ridiculously named Drillatron—but these events are rare. Each character faces eight battles and there are up to 15 playable characters. We did the math. That is 120 nearly identical brawls.



Every character has special skills and weapons, which produce battles that (initially) appear distinctive; combined with the special attacks, well, the visuals aren't dreck.

Samurai Heroes has its moments, but they don't make up for the game's overall mind-numbing, soul-crushing repetition. ANNE LEWIS

PlayStation **5**

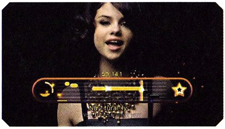


Monopoly Streets

Format **PS3** Pub **Electronic Arts** Dev **Electronic Arts**
Price **$39.99** ESRB **Everyone**

Rolling doubles won't spring anyone from this jail. Fifty dollars provides no respite. Now, consider this: The prison is *metaphor*. The classic board game *Monopoly* gets a fresh coat of paint for its ignominious shove down the stairs with *Monopoly Streets*. In the attempt to energize *Monopoly*, to make it something palatable for the videogame set, the developers have created a yappy, grating experience complete with endless chirpy bleats, whistles, and sighs. Do not pass go, ye who enter here. GREG ORLANDO

PlayStation **4**

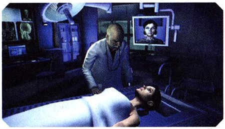


Disney Sing It Party Hits

Format **PS3** Pub **Disney Int.** Dev **Zoë Mode**
Price **$39.99, $49.99 (with mic)** ESRB **Everyone**

One's reaction to *Disney Sing It: Party Hits'* cover reveals all: If Demi Lovato, Selena Gomez, and whichever Jonas brother elicit a tweenage squeal, pick it up. If they produce a bit of throwup in the mouth, pass. Still, Disney produces a slick karaoke package with singing lessons and pitch tracking that's arguably better than its competitors. We'd like more than the 30 track selections (DLC to come), but there's no denying *Party Hits'* surprising popularity at our family gatherings. ROGER BURCHILL

PlayStation **7**

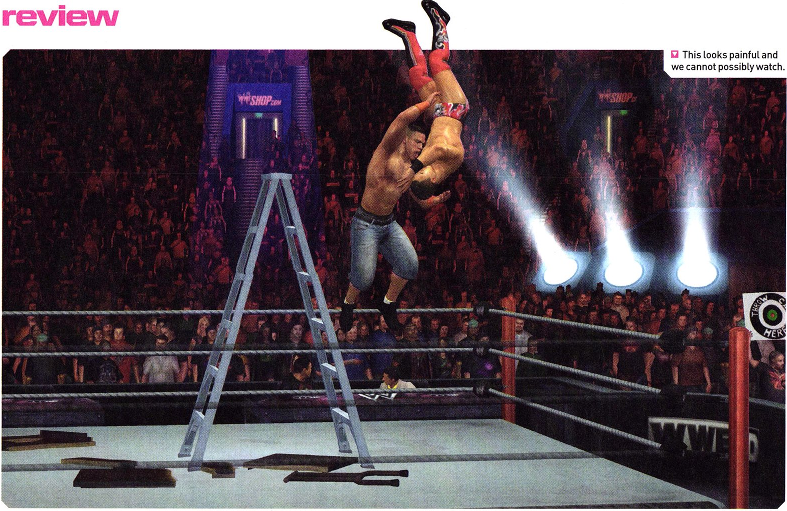


CSI Fatal Conspiracy

Format **PS3** Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Telltale Games**
Price **$29.99** ESRB **Mature**

As with other *CSI* titles, *Fatal Conspiracy* is a point-and-click adventure almost exactly like an episode of the TV show, including the occasional "Here's what happened" cinematic. Players gather evidence, analyze it, and beg for a warrant, episode after episode—enjoyable in an "Oh hey, I'm learning something" kind of way. The graphics are reminiscent of a PS2 game and the entire story is riddled with awkward product placement, but for *CSI* fans it's a value-priced way to kill a couple of hours. ANNE LEWIS

PlayStation **5**



This looks painful and we cannot possibly watch.

WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2011

More raw, less smackdown

Wrestling tends to pile up the bad ideas like corpses after a particularly gruesome massacre. Wrestler Triple H once had to grapple with a mannequin because someone thought a necrophilia storyline would be smashing entertainment for World Wrestling Federation fans. The grappling porn star Val Venis was introduced to a sword-wielding nutjob who, in an earnest moment, threatened to use a samurai sword to "choppy, choppy" a certain portion of Venis' anatomy. So it goes.

The World Wrestling Federation has since become World Wrestling Entertainment and the bad ideas have become more family friendly. The sad truth is there's no escape from someone's poor judgment. Even with videogame wrestling.

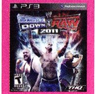
Chris Jericho is wandering through a series of empty corridors. This is THQ stabbing at a new feature for its Road to Wrestlemania mode: an interactive backstage area where the game's wrestlers can prove, definitively, that "interactive" is a subjective term.

The backstage locker rooms are empty. The green room is empty. The parking lot is empty. When Randy Orton steps in front of the camera for an interview, Jericho can rush right up to his face...and do absolutely nothing but watch as Orton yammers on. Industrious players can hunt for stuff to do, but there's not much fun—or action—to be had here. These areas seem more wasteland than anything else, and certainly aren't suggestive of the chaotic, well-populated backstages hinted at on WWE programming.

Grappling With Time

WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2011 isn't crippled by its Spartan, unfun backstage areas, mind, but the matter serves to highlight a series of baffling design choices. Obviously, with limited time and resources, THQ and its developer Yuke's walk a tightrope in creating a new wrestling game every year. Game fans need to be sold new features, features that can be cranked out in a reasonable time.

Info



Format PS3
Pub THQ
Dev Yuke's Media Creations
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like jobbing to Barry Horowitz.

Matches Made in Heaven Oh, the heads we'll crack

Hell in a Cell
Hellish!

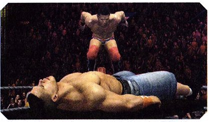
Ladder
Might as well climb.

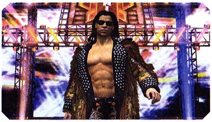
TLC
Or: Tables, ladders, and chairs.

Royal Rumble
It's a battle royale, only more regal.

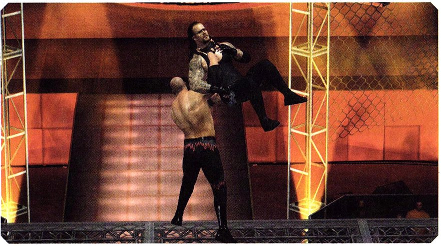
Tag Team
Two-on-two.

The Undertaker wrestles for *SmackDown.* He has a huge, possibly abnormal, forehead.





In wrestling parlance: "Do the job" equals "Lose a match."



Something has to give. In this case, it's a sense of polish, a sense that everything is whole and not just *done. 2011* offers WWE Universe, a free-form mode wherein players are free to create matches, assign wrestlers to different programs, form tag-teams, etc., with the game recognizing play patterns and reacting accordingly. It's a solid idea, but get into gameplay and it's clear where THQ skimped. Cutscenes designed to further storylines replay over and over, potholing any dim sense of realism; Vince McMahon struts out to announce that a victorious wrestler must fight a new challenger, a run-in causes a referee distraction during a match, and so on.

The wrestling, too, seems fraught with this incomplete effort. Ladder matches are excruciating affairs because the game wholly botches the concept of a tired or wounded wrestler not being able to immediately pop back up after a brutal beating. Transitions between individual maneuvers prove stilted and referees can oftentimes be knocked insensate without calling for someone—anyone—to be disqualified. In wrestler-speak: This one does *the job*. The big, unfortunate, rush job, that is. **GREG ORLANDO**

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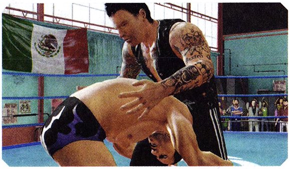
Tecnicos wage war against the villainous Rudos in Mexico.



Lucha Libre AAA
Heroes Del Ring
Mucha Lucha

Info

Format PS3
Pub Slang/Konami
Dev Immersion Games
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like a tasty Mexican alternative to standard wrestling fare.

The well-meaning but clueless announcer proclaims "The people are getting anxious because the show is about to begin," as *El Funcionario* ("the public official") goes flying outside the wrestling ring. And this is odd because the match has been going on for a few minutes.

Lucha Libre AAA: Heroes Del Ring offers a bare-bones wrestling package, one based on the oftentimes barking insane world of Mexican grappling. As the first entry in what may become a series, *Ring* proves endearing, but it's not yet lovable enough to take down its more established wrestling game brethren. It lacks an extensive move set; its commentary is oftentimes only vaguely related to wrestling, let alone the match at hand; and it only offers a handful of match types.

Yet this is a start, and a decent one. Although the wrestlers move slowly, their movements are fluid. A simple control scheme allows players to immerse themselves in the beatdowns rather than the button commands, and the character creator system has depth enough to cobble together the kookiest *Tecnicos* (good guys) and *Rudos* (pond scum).

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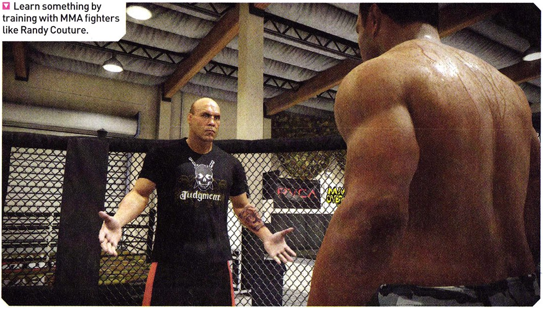
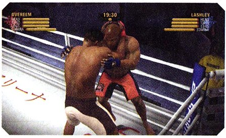
GREG ORLANDO

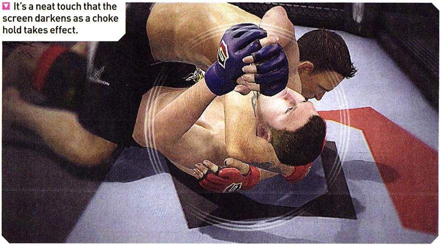

Learn something by training with MMA fighters like Randy Couture.

Mastering the clinch technique lends a real edge in stand-up scenarios.



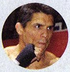
EA Sports MMA

A worthy challenger


It's a neat touch that the screen darkens as a choke hold takes effect.

Fight Card

FEDOR EMELIANENKO
Dominant independent heavyweight



FRANK SHAMROCK
Noted undefeated middleweight

RANDY COUTURE
Multiple weight class champ

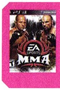
BOBBY LASHLEY
The latest former pro-wrestler to hit it big

As referee Big John McCarthy says, "Let's get it on!" The gauntlet has been thrown by EA Sports as it tries to take the mixed martial arts championship from the very accomplished THQ and its Ultimate Fighting Championship franchise. And while *EA Sports MMA* has a strong and unique style compared to *UFC,* the winner of the match-up isn't so clear.

MMA separates itself from *UFC* with controls that take a page from EA Sports' *Fight Night.* All the strikes are done with subtle manipulations of the right-analog stick and after just a few fights, pulling off combos is easy. It's a more elegant solution than using face buttons for the variety of attacks, especially when kicks are brought into the mix.

While the stand-up action really shines, that's only half the equation. Ground moves are simpler, but that's not always for the best. Takedowns and the sprawls to resist them are single-button commands and are dependant on reading the opponent, and on timing, to execute. It's the same when the action hits the ground, as transitioning between positions is the same basic one-button press. This isn't intially clear so novices can get away with buttonmashing.

Submissions suffer a similar fate, as once the mini-game starts for an Armbar or Kimura, it's a complicated tug of war of button-tapping while simultaneously watching the stamina indicator. Submissions are fight enders, so they shouldn't be too easy to perform, but getting the mount and punching a guy into unconsciousness is substantially easier, which discourages attempting submissions at all.



Info

Format PS3 **Pub** EA Sports **Dev** EA Tiburon **Price** $59.99 **ESRB** Teen **It's like** *Fight Night,* but with 100 percent more kicks and chokes.

The Career mode is fine for a standard "become the champ" story and it does a much better job of teaching the controls than the tutorial—plus, it's supported by a robust character creator. Career also introduces players to the wide world of MMA, including several different rule sets that make the UFC seem restrictive by comparison. The roster also reflects a wider scope of MMA, featuring many legends and international stars the UFC doesn't always represent. Still, UFC diehards may take offense; few current UFC fighters are in *MMA.*

MMA may have a real edge when it comes to online. Features such as a leveling/prestige system and broadcasts of online bouts with live commentary are implemented well. It could be something really special, *if* the community shows up.

EA's effort ends up being a healthy alternative to *UFC,* and MMA enthusiasts will appreciate the deeper look it takes at the sport, but it just doesn't do quite enough to pull ahead of its competition. *MMA* doesn't get KOed, but *UFC* retains the title in a surprisingly close split decision. HENRY GILBERT

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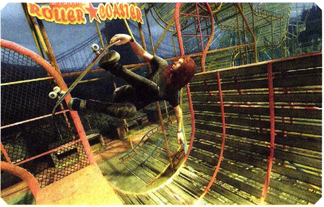
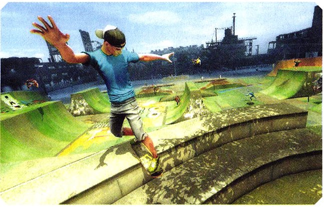


Shaun White Skateboarding possesses all the authenticity of a Mountain Dew commercial.



Shaun White Skateboarding

Don't go with the flow

Info
Format PS3 **Pub** Ubisoft
Dev Ubisoft Montreal
Price $59.99 **ESRB** Teen
It's like skateboarding tries to save the world and fails.

When a game's title contains the name of a particular sport, it's a good idea to get the sport right. Yet somehow *Shaun White Skateboarding* fails as a skateboarding game. The controls feel clumsy and unintuitive, relying on a watered-down version of *Skate's* "flick the analog stick" control system that's devoid of the challenge, and thus the appeal, of that interface. And should *that* prove too complicated, players can simply mash the X button to perform random tricks.

Strangely enough, individual tricks don't matter in *Shaun White*. Their real purpose is to fill a "flow" meter that, when full, triggers changes to the environment and allows players to complete objectives. Players have zero control over how the world transforms and it's not great for skating even once it's changed, but it does add a semi-creative puzzle-platformer dimension making the lackluster skating slightly more palatable.

There's also a hopelessly ham-fisted "fight the man" storyline that undermines itself with crass and blatant in-game advertising.

But look at it this way: It's better than *Tony Hawk: Ride*.

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SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

PES 2011

A successful but polarizing reinvention

To be clear, *Pro Evolution Soccer 2011* is tight, skillful, deep, tactical, and maddening (in a good way). The new "engineered for freedom" 360-degree passing wasn't the issue we expected: We missed the odd five-yard pass when under pressure, but conversely, the ability to slot inch-perfect diagonal throughpasses was rewarding.

The three-stage tackling system wasn't alien either, but was where doubt crept in. Initially, games were littered with innocuous ankle-tap free kicks that crippled the flow. When we learned to "step in" for a tackle only when an opponent exposed the ball, the free kicks plummeted—which is when the lack of goals started to grate.

Why could we only score off crosses? How do we buy space in one-on-ones? Why didn't the AI teammates make runs when we wanted? Mentally, we were still playing *FIFA* and it was infuriating when *PES* didn't bend to our will and demands. Our advice: reduce difficulty, head to Training mode, and be prepared to work *hard.*

After playing *PES 2011* for hours, we returned to *FIFA 11* and found it felt "fat" and imprecise. That said, after playing *FIFA*, *PES* felt Spartan and rigid. Both games are great in different ways—once attuned to one, it has a huge impact on the perception of the other. *PES 2011* still doesn't displace *FIFA* as PS3's best soccer game, but it does emerge improved and renewed.

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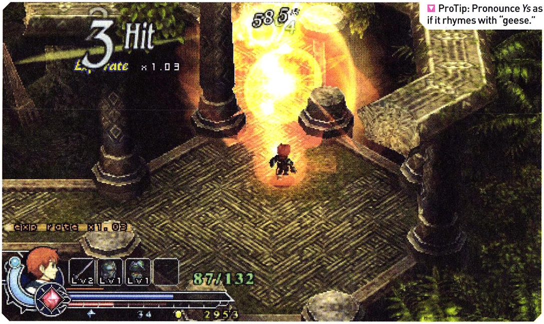
DAN DAWKINS

Info

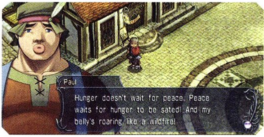
Format PS3
Pub Konami
Dev Konami
Price $59.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like soccer for people who crave complexity.



▼ ProTip: Pronounce *Ys* as if it rhymes with "geese."

▲ *Oath in Felghana* is a reworking of the third *Ys* game.

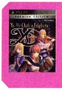
Anya
(giggles) ...Now go, 'fore I make ye walk the plank!



Paul
Hunger doesn't wait for peace. Peace waits for hunger to be sated! And my belly's roaring like a wildfire!

Ys The Oath in Felghana

Take the plunge. Take the oath.



Info

Format PSP **Pub** XSEED Games **Dev** Falcom **Price** $29.99 ($39.99 for Premium Edition) **ESRB** Teen **It's like** *Ys III*, as should be expected. But way better.

It's not always been easy being a *Ys* fan in the United States. While multiple new entries of the popular role-playing game series were released in Japan, American gamers were often ignored. Lately, however, XSEED has been making up for lost time with a rapid-fire string of PSP releases. We've already gotten the chance to enjoy the recently released *Ys Seven*, and now the series continues with *Ys: The Oath in Felghana*.

Technically, though, "continues" isn't really the most accurate term. Instead of a sequel, *Felghana* is actually a reimagining of the third *Ys* title, which was released in 1989. Veteran players will be glad to know that only the basic premise of the game is copied from the original—the actual gameplay has been heavily expanded, making this way more than a simple graphical upgrade.

As is typical of *Ys*, *Felghana* has our hero, Adol Christin, wandering into a new town, learning about some nefarious goings-on, and then having to save the day. Of course, being an action-RPG series, *Ys* usually places the emphasis on the *action* part. Still, *Felghana* does suffer a bit from the same problem that plagued *Ys Seven:* A lot of time is wasted on the mostly uninteresting storyline, making us wait before we get to the truly exciting parts.

Once the actual game begins, however, it's outstanding. Forgoing the partner-based fighting system of *Ys Seven*, the focus is once again solely on Adol. Steady level progression, devious dungeon designs, and some terrific boss encounters keep the journey engaging and challenging. During combat, enemies frequently drop stat-boosting potions encouraging players to dispatch as many foes as possible within a short time limit. It's a clever addition and, when combined with new moves such as a double jump and the ability to stun enemies, it serves as a fine example of how to evolve an already effective combat system. Oh, and the soundtrack totally rocks, but that's to be expected from *Ys*.

Yes, it's been tough for American fans, but things are definitely getting better. It almost feels wrong playing another great *Ys* title so soon after the last one, but we're sure we'll find a way to cope. **PHIL THEOBALD**

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Cast List

RED

Adol Christin
This fiery-haired adventurer is brave, but not very talkative.

BLUE

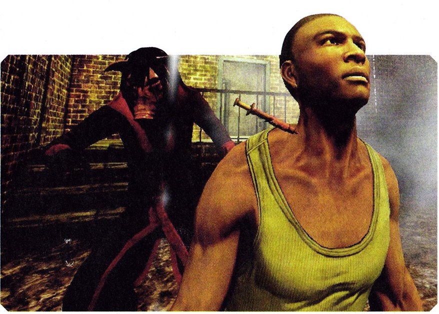
Dogi
Need a wall busted down? Dogi's the lovable lunkhead to call.

YELLOW

Elena
Dogi's adorable childhood friend is worried about her brother, Chester.

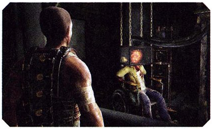
EVIL YELLOW

Chester
He's not the scariest named villain ever. But what are his motives?



SAW II
Flesh & Blood

Brainteasers meet brain-splatters



This will either end badly or horribly. There are no other options.

Info
Format PS3 **Pub** Konami **Dev** Zombie Studios **Price** $49.99 **ESRB** Mature **It's like** being the mouse in the mousetrap.

The *SAW* videogames position themselves much like the *SAW* movies—an annual dose of interactive gruesomeness. And as with the films, we find ourselves begrudgingly returning not out of enthusiasm, but bleak curiosity. Zombie Studios follows up a literally eye-opening kick-off with spine snapping, chest scything with explosive vests, acid baths, and drowning tanks. "Accidentally" mess up the puzzles and we get to watch Jigsaw's cruel machinations play out in gruesome high definition.

But where the films are quite happy rehashing last year's gore, *Flesh & Blood* actually manages to improve upon its predecessor. Gone is the sub-*Silent Hill* combat, replaced with occasional skull-cracking quick-time events. Nail-protruding bats to the face bring to mind the *Manhunt* game Rockstar was too chicken to make for PS3, and the tired labyrinthine level designs have been greatly improved. Now, each stage is constructed around saving a victim from a building-size trap, forcing our hero (the son of the last game's protagonist) to find escape routes in hotel lobbies and acid factories.

How on earth the allegedly cancer-ridden Jigsaw has modified several street blocks into trap gauntlets is never explained. Just be glad he's moved beyond the original's dull corridor-puzzle-corridor gameplay. Here we have to ease trolleys past arsonists, avoid dirty cops with cover-to-cover dashes, and decipher visual clues to open doors. Zombie Studios has taken a well-chosen leaf out of *Batman: Arkham Asylum's* book with some Riddler-style perspective challenges too. Indeed, *SAW's* unexpected smarts don't really fit in with all its grungy talk of rapists, murderers, and pederasts.

Neither do they fit with the survival horror trappings, a tired leftover from the original. The game loves a good sudden-death quick-time event as one in three doors is rigged with a shotgun or scythe. It certainly sucks to fumble a button press and get whisked back to a horribly placed checkpoint.

We get it: Jigsaw is an unforgiving bastard. But he's holding the game back. There are some brains here; why waste them by splattering them all against the wall? **MATTHEW CASTLE**

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DLC Roundup

Borderlands
Claptrap's New Robot Revolution
Price $9.99 **ESRB** Mature

Putting a goofy spin on the *Terminator* theme, the Claptraps are staging a massive robotic revolt. Diving into the fray to thwart them provides ample opportunities for laughs and loot hunting in this oftentimes hilarious story-driven expansion.

Red Dead Redemption
Liars and Cheats
Price $9.99 **ESRB** Mature

Liars and Cheats adds two main modes allowing players to race horses or take turns storming heavily fortified strongholds. Aside from new gang hideouts and hunting grounds to explore, it also opens up Poker and Liar's Dice games to multiplayer matches.

Download of the Month

Alexis
HP 150/ 168
3
morale
winner
Storm
9
○ :Stand
□ :Target
Avan
HP 309/
4

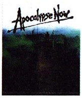
Valkyria Chronicles II
DLC Pack 2
Price $4.99 **ESRB** Teen

The PSP's action-packed civil war in Europa just got a lot more explosive with this massive downloadable content pack that's locked and loaded with 22 extra missions. The diverse missions range from recovering captured mines and group training exercises to battling phantom tanks.

Apocalypse Now

The ultimate journey into darkness

Info



Price $59.99
Creators Francis Ford Coppola, John Milius
Starring Martin Sheen, Robert Duvall, Marlon Brando, Frederic Forrest
Rated R **Extras** Two versions of the movie, *Hearts of Darkness* documentary, commentary tracks, interviews, etc.

Francis Ford Coppola's Vietnam War epic, *Apocalypse Now,* has earned a nearly legendary status over the years. Both maligned and loved when it was first released in 1979, the movie was, perhaps more than anything, initially known for the drama and turmoil behind the camera. One of the most arduous and mishap-filled productions in film-making history (rivaled only by Werner Herzog's *Aguirra: The Wrath of God* in 1972), it's no small miracle Coppola's epically scaled Vietnam vision of Joseph Conrad's classic novella, *Heart of Darkness,* managed to finish shooting.

Whether the end result was worth all the fuss is open to argument. *Now* is the perfect definition of a flawed masterpiece. At times, the film is truly one of the greatest war movies and anti-war statements ever made. When it works, it's tense, enthralling, uncomfortable, and entertaining. Yet other times—especially the meandering and drug-addled performance of Marlon Brando in the final act—the movie is ponderous and clumsy, falling under the weight of its heavy-handed message. It was the '70s after all.

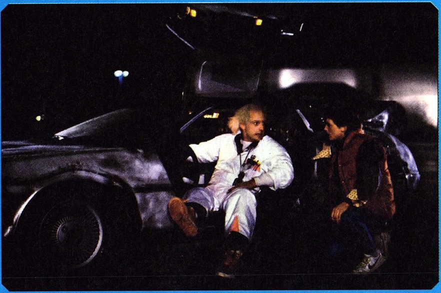
Flawed or not, *Now* is one of the few movies that has completely engrained itself into modern society. A stunning cast of side characters opened the door to the kind of male-bonding, machismo-heavy dialogue that almost every military-themed movie has since emulated. Robert Duvall's performance is the stuff of acting legend and there's no corner of our media-addled society that his delivery of "I love the smell of napalm in the morning" hasn't managed to creep into. Hell, Laurence Fishburne even got his start here as a baby-faced teen soldier.

Beyond the movie itself, however, what makes this release so impressive is the production quality permeating the entire collection. The picture quality is superb and the audio is house shaking. The three-disc set contains both the original 1979 version and the more recently released, slightly longer *Apocalypse Now Redux* version. Coppola provides commentary and insight the entire way as well, and there's plenty of old footage and behind-the-scenes material.

The real cream of the collection, however, is *Hearts of Darkness.* This is the feature-length theatrically released documentary that's composed of footage and interviews shot during the production that go into vivid, candid, and often unflattering detail about just what a nightmare the film was to create. In many ways, it's arguably a better movie than *Now* itself.

PlayStation
The Official Magazine
8

JASON D'APRILE



Back to the Future

25th Anniversary Trilogy

The power of '80s love endures

Info

Price $79.98 **Creators** Robert Zemeckis, Steven Spielberg **Starring** Michael J. Fox, Christopher Lloyd **Rated** PG **Extras** Commentary, documentaries, deleted scenes.

There were a lot of movies made in the '80s that have special places in the hearts of moviegoers, but few movies were quite so '80s-centric as the *Back to the Future* trilogy. Far from simply being the decade the films were set (or at least started) in, the '80s were also the keystone to trips to the past and the future, with plenty of sly, timely cultural references.

Say what you want about the questionable science and, yes, plot holes, but all three films are a ton of fun and 25 years later, the original *Back to the Future* is still a great movie. Taking all the familiar elements of the average teen coming-of-age story—family problems, bullies, romance, and of course, the evils of high school—and twisting them around a clever time travel hook proved to be a winning combination. The sequels were admittedly hit and miss—neither had the charm and originality of the first, yet both were fun and entertaining nonetheless because of the character appeal of Fox's Marty McFly and Lloyd's Doc Brown.

Since this is the 25th anniversary release, Universal has included a heaping plateful of extras. In addition to all the extras from the previous DVD release, there are several new documentaries that are definitely worth watching. Of special interest is the glimpse of original footage showing Eric Stoltz in the role of Marty McFly, before he was canned and Fox was brought on board. It's disappointing that Universal didn't go whole hog and give longtime fans the chance to finally see all—or at least, more—of this legendary footage.

Other than that minor complaint, this is a terrific release. The films look great, the audio is better than ever, and 25 years later, *Back to the Future* remains a charming nostalgic gem to travel back to a bygone era. JD

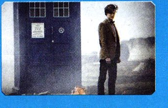
PlayStation The Official Magazine 8

Blu-ray Round-Up

Sherlock Season 1

Price $39.98 **Rated** Not Rated

The BBC has re-created Sherlock Holmes and the results are far removed from Robert Downey Jr.'s rendition. Looking and acting like a barely legal snot-nosed brat with a bad case of Asperger's syndrome, this Sherlock lives in modern times, and the writers have keenly updated all the standards of the classic tales. ⑧



Doctor Who The Complete Fifth Series

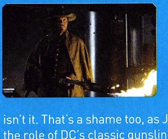
Price $39.98 **Rated** NR

BBC's latest iteration of the Earth-defending Time Lord is the perfect time for newcomers to jump aboard. The effects are better than ever and the humor is notched up thanks to Matt Smith's goofy and likeable performance. The doctor is, in fact, in. ⑦

Superman/ Batman Apocalypse

Price $29.99 **Rated** PG-13

WB hits a snag with this rendition of the Supergirl story arc from the popular *Superman/Batman* monthly comic. While the story itself is passable, too much of the dialogue is groan worthy and the voice acting and animation fall flat. ⑥



Jonah Hex

Price $35.99 **Rated** PG-13

Somewhere on a cutting room floor might be a fun supernatural Western, but this isn't it. That's a shame too, as Josh Brolin is terrific in the role of DC's classic gunslinger. Sadly, over-editing and an absurd plot doom the movie. ⑤

mail@ptom

Moved by Move, Rushing to judgment, and more pics of our favorite cosplayer

Email us at PTOM_letters@futureus.com or write to PTOM, c/o Future US Inc., 4000 Shoreline Ct. Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

PS3
PSP
PlayStation.2
PlayStation
The Official Magazine
SECRETS FROM EVERY GOD OF WAR REVEALED
WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW
God of War
Ghost of Sparta
BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY
Bigger and badder than ever!
LAST GUARDIAN
DUKE
NEED FOR SPEED

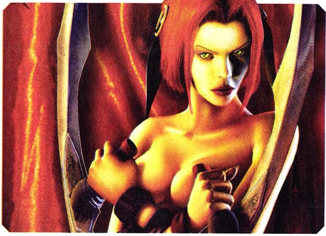
Always on the go? Kratos says: "GET 100 PERCENT RDA OF VENGEANCE AND FURY WITH PSP!"

Call It a Comeback?

I have just finished two games on PlayStation 2, they are *Psi-Ops* [Midway] and *BloodRayne 2* [Terminal Reality/Majesco], and the endings for both games show there are sequels coming since there are unfinished business in the storylines. So where are the sequels? I'm sure that other people like me are still wondering about them. And this isn't the only problem that I'm talking about in this letter; Sony seems to have forgotten about sequels for two games: *C-12: Final Resistance* on PSone and *Ico* on PS2. I heard the ending for *C-12* shows not all the aliens in the game are dead, which means that there's a sequel that's supposed to come, and I'm sure that other fans are still wondering about what happened in the end of the story for both games. So can't Sony, Midway, and Majesco start making those sequels of the games?

MUHAMMAD AL-ABRI SAUDI ARABIA

Game companies love cliffhangers and open-ended finales because it leaves the door open for sequels. But unfinished business is often just that and, with some games, the door is best slammed shut and then cemented over. In the case of Psi-Ops*, the company that made the game went out of business. There's no word on sequels for the other games you mentioned, either, although Sony plans to release* The Last Guardian *for the 2011 hoiday season, which is a spiritual successor to Ico's spiritual successor* Shadow of the Colossus.



Fun Fact: BloodRayne was shown nude in *Playboy* magazine.

PSM Revisited

I have been a subscriber to this magazine since way before it became PTOM. My question: Is there anybody left from the PSM days? If not, where did they all go?

JOSHUA WARE LOUISVILLE, KY

They're around somewhere. Despite our best efforts, we can still hear them scratching in the walls. Oh, and sometimes they'll call out from somewhere in the bay where they were... But we've said too much. And the moral of the story is, get your magazine articles in on time. We're just saying, is all. Oh, and supereditor Chris Slate, formerly of PSM, was personally wooed by Mario to become editor in chief of that fine penny broadsheet (and our sister magazine) Nintendo Power.

Letter of the Month

THE RIGHT MOVE

I recently read your review of the new Move games and of the Move itself. I have tried it out and think it's great. I have one son (eight) who because of a medical condition requires occupational and physical therapy. He always seems behind everyone else, and I know as he gets older he will probably be ridiculed. The Move requires precision and exact movements, requiring my son to concentrate better. Plus he can learn free from anxiety of what his peers might be thinking. My wife is so convinced the Move is great, she even said some something truly awesome: "Do you think we should get a second PS3 for the Move to be in the living room and keep yours in the bedroom?" (I play there to enjoy games that I don't want the kids to see me playing until they're older.) Am I lucky or just have the greatest wife? I think both.

H. PATCH MCALLEN, TX

We welcome reader photos, letters, and stories ("Submissions"), however, we cannot promise to publish any Submission and none will be returned. Neither PlayStation: The Official Magazine ("PTOM") nor Future US, Inc. shall be liable for loss or damage to any Submission. By sending in your Submissions to PTOM you represent and warrant that you own or otherwise have all necessary rights to the Submissions to allow us to publish them in PTOM and as follows. You grant PTOM a worldwide, royalty-free, perpetual, irrevocable, non-exclusive right and fully sub-licensable license to use, copy, distribute, publish, modify, adapt, translate, and store, your Submissions, in any form, format, or medium, of any kind now known or later developed and to use your name, likeness, and any other information in connection with the use of the Submission you provide.

Stone In Love

In the November issue letters section (Issue #38), someone inquired about having more Rush songs available for music games. You guys put a picture of Journey there with a cute caption relating to a Journey song. Is there a new intern in the office or did I just miss the joke?

BRIAN ERWIN ONTARIO, CA

We blame the error on gremlins. And to make it up to everyone who wrote in, pointed out our blunder, and suggested our parents drank too much of the special Kool-Aid, we'd like to run another picture of Rush in all its rocktastic glory. The band truly has "the right stuff."

Calendar Girl

I just would like to extend my gratitude to you guys for featuring my Baroness cosplay from San Diego Comic Con 2010 (Page 8, Issue #38). I am Alodia Gosiengfiao, a full-time cosplayer, model, and artist from the Philippines! It is an honor to be part of your latest issue.

I've attached a few more photos I did a few months back that garnered quite a number of attention on the Internet, titled "The Gamer." Since my little sister and I are huge fans of the PlayStation console (and are avid gamers), we did a shoot with it. I'm the model and my little sister Ashley was the photographer. One photo has *Final Fantasy XIII* as the background in the monitor!

If it's not too much, can you include our Web site: www.alodiagosiengfiao.com and maybe my Facebook page as well (www.facebook.com/alodiagosiengfiao) since I regularly post updates and convention photos there!

ALODIA GOSIENGFIAO THE PHILIPPINES

Yes, by which we mean wow.

Fly for [Expletive Deleted]

Just read the article about inverted gamers in the November 2010 issue (Issue #38). I'm 28 and I have always had to invert the Y-axis when possible. I always thought it was strange that up is up just didn't work for me. I also don't know anyone personally who prefers to not invert. The only real issue I've had is in *Battlefield: Bad Company 2*, everything inverts except the helicopter controls and that's why I can't fly for [expletive deleted].

KEVIN PATTERSON II HARRINGTON, DE

Just hold the controller upside-down.

Ask GARY

Q We regret to inform Steinman, Gary, that we at the Shh! Ninja Association, are questioning his ninja gaming skills. Not once have we seen him use a shuriken to destroy an Xbox 360 or knock it off a shelf with nun chucks. Nor have we seen him use a blow-dart gun to assassinate his staff when they beat him at *Uncharted 2*. Therefore, we have decided to ask him: Are you a ninja or not?

BAILEY CURRENT PARTS UNKNOWN

A You haven't seen me do any of those things precisely because I'm a ninja. Duh.

The Future Is Now

Why is the November issue out in September? Wouldn't it make sense to release the November issue in November?

DUC DAO PARTS UNKNOWN

The future is now for the PTOM staff. And tomorrow is, like, the future plus one day. I think what we're trying to say, Duc, is that it's probably not a good idea to go ahead with that plan to visit Lemur City wearing the apricot suit. Oh, and magazines routinely stagger their publication dates to ensure issues stay on newsstands longer. Or it has to do with how dog years work.

Et Cetera

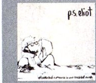
All the other stuff that distracts PTOM

She-Hulk

"With the current Hulk series having turned into a mutated mess in the wake of the World War Hulk event, I've been hunting down Dan Slott's hilarious and, dare I say, heartwarming collections."

GARY STEINMAN

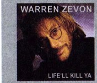
Introverted Romance in our Trouble Minds



"Warm and fuzzy in both sound and feel, this album from female-fronted indie rockers P.S. Eliot kept me company all issue long. Plus, what an awesome band name!"

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

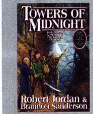
Life'll Kill Ya



"Warren Zevon was, in fact, killed by life. But not before he created this masterful album about fistfuls of rain, Elvis, and being in the house when the house burned down."

GREG ORLANDO

Towers of Midnight



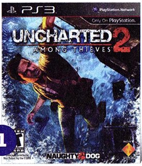
"Apologies to Brandon Sanderson, but I'm woefully behind in my reading as I haven't even gotten to *The Gathering Storm* yet. But *Towers of Midnight* has me itching to reignite my love/hate relationship with the *Wheel of Time* series."

ROGER BURCHILL

PS3

Essential collection

Build the ultimate PS3 library with our no-filler guide to the best next-gen games


PS3
UNCHARTED 2
AMONG THIEVES
NAUGHTY DOG

1

Action Adventure

Uncharted 2

Among Thieves

There's no way around it, Nathan Drake is without a doubt the PS3's biggest star and *Uncharted 2* is his most impressive adventure yet. Make no excuses: Get out there and buy it.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Naughty Dog**

PS3
GOD OF WAR III

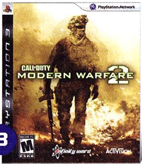
2

Action Adventure

God of War III

Huge beautiful battlegrounds. Brutally gory fights with magnificent climaxes. We expected the world from the finale of Kratos' trilogy and we got it. A must-have for anyone with even the slightest amount of bloodlust.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Santa Monica Studio**


CALL OF DUTY
MODERN WARFARE 2
ACTIVISION

3

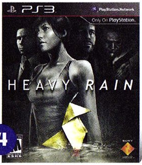
First-Person Shooter

Call of Duty

Modern Warfare 2

Ever since the first *Modern Warfare*, the *Call of Duty* franchise has been the preeminent multiplayer experience. The sequel only improves on the formula. Find out what the big deal is!

10 Pub **Activision**
Dev **Infinity Ward**


PS3
HEAVY RAIN

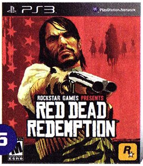
4

Adventure

Heavy Rain

Innovative, intriguing, and immersive, Quantic Dream brought us one of the most original titles in years. The mystery of the Origami Killer will keep everyone guessing until it's solved or the heroes die in the process.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Quantic Dream**


PS3
ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS
RED DEAD REDEMPTION

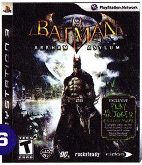
5

Open-World Shooter

Red Dead Redemption

Continuing with its record of amazing titles, Rockstar's latest open-world game combines a drop-dead gorgeous Old West with a mesmerizing story and fabulous characters.

10 Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Rockstar SD/North**


BATMAN
ARKHAM ASYLUM
rocksteady
eidos

6

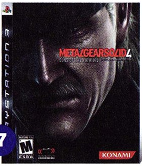
Action Adventure

Batman

Arkham Asylum

Finally, the Caped Crusader gets the current-gen game he deserves. Use a plethora of bat-gadgets and bat-moves to take back the Joker-controlled Arkham Asylum and love every second of it.

10 Pub **Eidos/Warner Bros.**
Dev **Rocksteady**


METAL GEAR SOLID 4
GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS
KONAMI

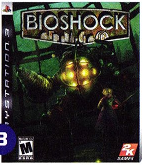
7

Stealth

Metal Gear Solid 4

Hideo Kojima's masterpiece might be criticized for its huge amounts of lengthy cutscenes and convoluted storyline, but that shouldn't stop anyone from experiencing one of the most important games on any platform today.

10 Pub **Konami**
Dev **Kojima Productions**


BIOSHOCK
2K GAMES

8

First-Person Shooter

BioShock

One of the most beautifully designed shooters of all time with an amazing story to boot. Due to the freshness and originality of the first romp through Rapture, we recommend the original over the still magnificent sequel.

10 Pub **2K Games**
Dev **Irrational Games**

PS3
SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV
CAPCOM

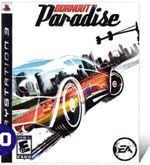
9

Fighter

Super Street Fighter IV

An update to the best fighting game from the most well-respected series in gaming history makes for a can't-miss title. Kicking heads and nostalgia combine to form one perfect package.

10 Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Capcom**


BURNOUT Paradise
EA

10

Racing

Burnout Paradise

Fun racing is something that never gets old. Speeding around Paradise City, crashing cars, and enjoying the generous stream of DLC and fan service is great preparation for Criterion's forthcoming *NFS: Hot Pursuit*.

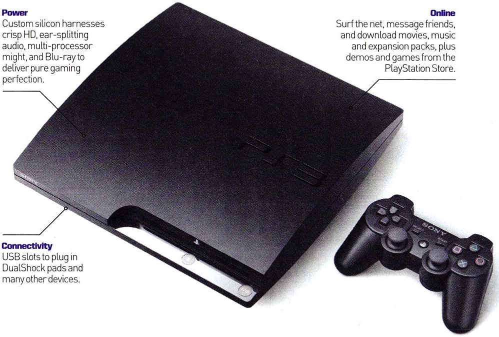
10 Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **Criterion Games**

Team Choice

Dead Rising 2

"Zombie whacking proves a wonderful distraction from the tedium that is my human existence and, as an added bonus, this game also reminds me why I hate magicians, unfunny comedians, and guys in mascot costumes."

Greg Orlando
Executive Editor



Power
Custom silicon harnesses crisp HD, ear-splitting audio, multi-processor might, and Blu-ray to deliver pure gaming perfection.

Online
Surf the net, message friends, and download movies, music and expansion packs, plus demos and games from the PlayStation Store.

Connectivity
USB slots to plug in DualShock pads and many other devices.

Want More?
Get inside access to hot games, sizzling betas, and other goodies by subscribing to Qore. Well? What are you waiting for?

Get it now on PSN

11

Survival Horror

Resident Evil 5

Looking for a great co-op experience? Look no further than the long-running survival horror masters from the *Resident Evil* series. Taking down the undead horde doesn't get much more intense than this.

10 Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Capcom**

12

Platformer

LittleBigPlanet

Hasn't everyone wanted to create their own game at some point? *LittleBigPlanet* offers a shot at design greatness. Create and upload game levels and share them with the world. Oh, and playing the game is super fun too.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Media Molecule**

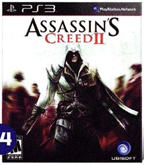
13

Role-Playing

Final Fantasy XIII

It might take a bit of a commitment, but the gorgeous visuals and crazy deep combat make this lengthy role-playing game more than worth the time it takes to get through it.

10 Pub **Square Enix**
Dev **Square Enix**



14

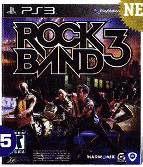
Stealth Adventure

Assassin's Creed II

While the first *Assassin's Creed* may not quite have lived up to its full potential, Ubisoft built off what they learned to create the best parkour-influenced stealth game of all time. It doesn't hurt that it's awfully pretty in action either.

10 Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Ubisoft Montreal**

NEW



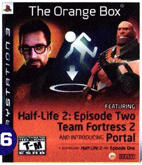
15

Music

Rock Band 3

Didn't think we could pass up the best party game going right now, did you? With a massive songlist and the brilliant new Pro mode, *Rock Band 3* easily overtakes its rival *Guitar Hero* for the top music game on PS3.

9 Pub **EA/MTV Games**
Dev **Harmonix**



16

Shooter

The Orange Box

So much value! It's impossible not to recommend *Half-Life 2* (considered by some the best shooter ever), *Team Fortress 2* (amazing multiplayer), and *Portal* (a hilarious and brilliantly original puzzler). And they're all in one box!

10 Pub **Valve**
Dev **Valve**

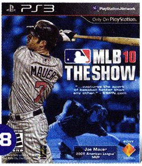
17

Shooter

Killzone 2

One of the best looking PS3 exclusives with fantastic multiplayer and a beautifully polished single-player campaign. Be warned, though: The game's name isn't just cool; it's perfectly fitting. *Killzone 2* can get tough!

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Guerrilla Games**



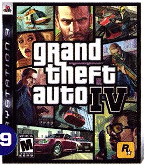
18

Sports

MLB 10: The Show

The undisputed king of the diamond only keeps getting better and better. Deep, rewarding gameplay coupled with a ridiculous amount of polish makes it the best sports game around.

10 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **SCE San Diego**



19

Open-World Action

Grand Theft Auto IV

It doesn't sell like crazy for no reason. This pinnacle of open-world gaming is one of the most incredible achivements that the medium has to offer. Great story, great characters, great adventure.

10 Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Rockstar North**

NEW

20

Action Adventure

Castlevania: Lords of Shadow

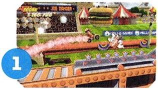
It's sort of like *God of War*, but better, but not as good, too. This *Castlevania* reboot is not only the first great 3D iteration of the long-running series, but an epic adventure in its own memorable right.

9 Pub **Konami**
Dev **MercurySteam**

PSN Best Games

It's the best of the best! Get the lowdown on this month's PSN goodies no one should live without

BEST FULL GAMES



1

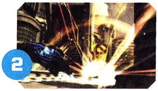
Platforming Puzzle Racer

Joe Danger

A mix of *ExciteBike*-style racing and insane stunt-driven platforming action, this vibrant indie gem shines brightly among the best PSN offerings available. Getting wild and dangerous has never been this awesome.

9

Pub **Hello Games**
Dev **Hello Games**



2

Futuristic Racing

WipEout HD

As with any good remix, *WipEout HD* cannibalizes the best aspects of the high-octane futuristic racing series in order to create one hell of a wild ride that'll knock players' dirty space socks completely off.

9

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **SCE Liverpool**

3

Multiplayer RTS

Fat Princess

Cake-fueled multiplayer mayhem is where this cute but brutal battler carries the bulk of its meaty weight. Force-feeding sweets to immobilize an enemy's chubby princess may not be PC, but it's super fun nonetheless.

8

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Titan Studios**

4

Zen Exploration

Flower

This gorgeous concept game makes blowing hordes of fluttering petals around a lush natural environment into an unforgettable experience that holds up against the biggest AAA offerings. Don't pass this one up.

9

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**

5

Puzzle Shooter

PixelJunk Shooter

The fourth entry in the *PixelJunk* series is easily the best. Saving trapped mining colonists with a versatile, environmental puzzle-solving ship is a creative and challenging affair taxing both the mind and reflexes.

9

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Q-Games**

BEST DEMOS

1

Third-Person Action

Enslaved: Odyssey to the West

Slave Monkey and his oppressor Trip battle mechanical oppressors while frantically searching for an escape route in the gripping first chapter of this lush action-adventure game.

Pub **Namco Bandai**
Dev **Ninja Theory**

2

Action Horror

Castlevania: Lords of Shadow

Fanged beasts wait to be turned into werewolf stew in this whiptastic demo. A dark night lit by the torchlight of struggling villagers is a gloomy backdrop for lycanthropic slaughter.

Pub **Konami**
Dev **MercurySteam**

3

Third-Person Action

God of War: Ghost of Sparta

Kratos goes fishing for a giant tentacled sea monster in this tumultuous romp through stormy seas. Up for making some demonic sushi? Here's a quick demo with the right killing flavor.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Ready at Dawn**

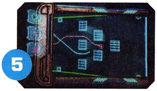
4

Lightsaber Slicey Action

Star Wars: Force Unleashed II

Defying Darth Vader and slicing the limbs and heads off of Stormtroopers is a great way to kick off the lightsaber swinging fun. Mind tricks, acrobatics, and force powers abound here.

Pub **LucasArts**
Dev **LucasArts**



5

Hacking Mini-game

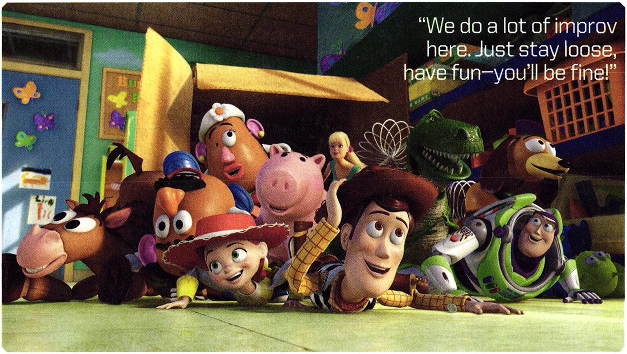
Dead Space: Ignition

This interactive comic sets up the action for the forthcoming PS3 space fright fest *Dead Space 2*. It features a hacking-themed racing mini-game for getting the digital engines revved.

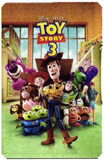
Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **Sumo Digital/Visceral**

PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're watching on our PS3 this month


"We do a lot of improv here. Just stay loose, have fun—you'll be fine!"

©Disney/Pixar



Toy Story 3

ETA **December 2** Rated **G** Genre **Comedy** Studio **Disney/Pixar**

We're not ashamed to admit that a few tears were shed when the PTOM staff saw *Toy Story 3* in the theater this past summer. Okay, maybe we are. But downloading the movie means that we're free to bawl again in the privacy of our own homes. With our manly egos intact, we can once again enjoy the exploits of Woody, Buzz, and the rest of the toy gang while wrestling with our childhood memories and the adult realization of our own mortality. The *Toy Story* series is one of the finest trilogies in motion picture history and a shoe-in for a Best Picture nomination at the Oscars. Don't dare miss it.

Top VDS Downloads

Movies

Predators
Jonah Hex
A Nightmare on Elm Street (2010)
Iron Man 2
Get Him to the Greek (Unrated)

TV Shows

The Event: Season 1
House: Season 7
Chuck: Season 4
Smallville: Season 10
The Venture Bros.: Season 4

BEST FREE STUFF

Action Adventure

R&C: All 4 One PAX Demo Video

Ratchet & Clank is back again. Get a closer look at the new co-op heavy multiplayer component in this video that covers a slew of new weapons, silly teamwork tactics, and story shenanigans.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Insomniac Games**

Cartoon Mod Racing

MNR Progressive Insurance Flo

Who doesn't love Flo from the Progressive auto insurance commercials? It's time to download this pop culture icon and burn some serious rubber. And we're sure we'll be covered if we crash our kart.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **United Front Games**

Third-Person Shooter

RDR: Hunting & Trading Outfits

Nothing says sexy like toting a cap made out of dead animals. These two new *Red Dead Redemption* outfits come with challenges and special abilities, as well as the added bonus of hunting jackalope.

Pub **Rockstar Games**
Dev **Rockstar San Diego**

First-Person Shooter

Bulletstorm Demo Video

Few things make a guy thirst for hot lead like this slick *Bulletstorm* demo video with commentary. Cliff highlights the many sadistic ways to rip dudes apart and earn crazy skill shots in the process.

Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **Epic Games**

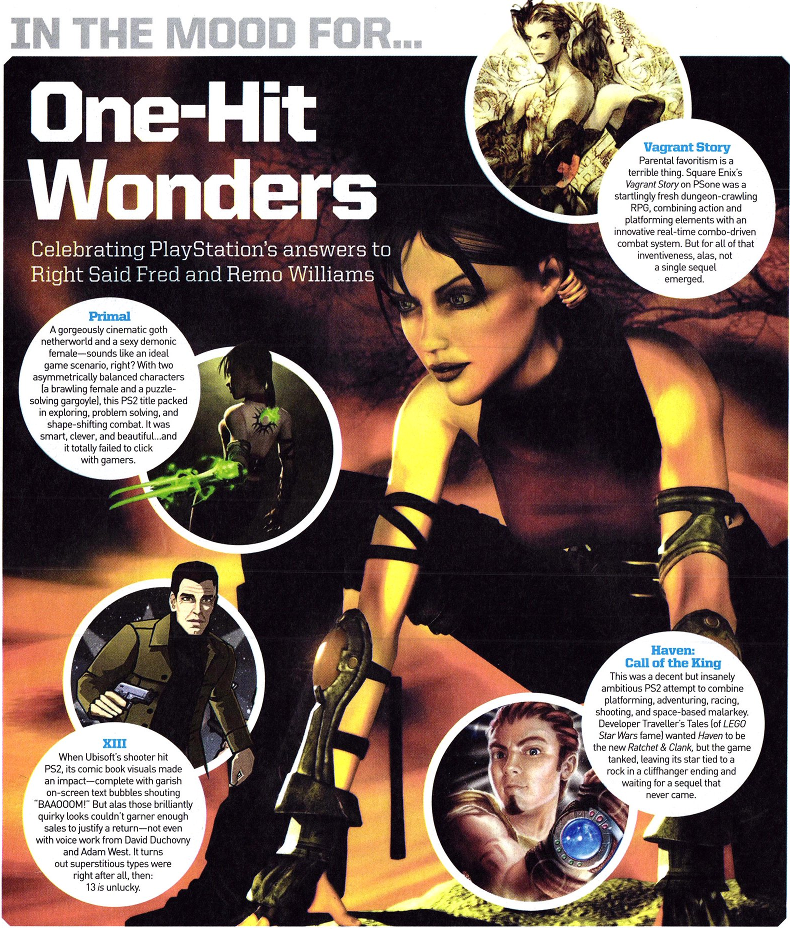
Real-Time Strategy

Swords & Soldiers Wallpapers

Marvel at visions of spiced meats, ninja monkeys, and other weirdness with free *Swords & Soldiers* wallpaper. Grab individual wallpapers for each of the game's three wacky factions.

Pub **Ronimo Games**
Dev **Ronimo Games**

IN THE MOOD FOR...



One-Hit Wonders

Celebrating PlayStation's answers to Right Said Fred and Remo Williams

Vagrant Story

Parental favoritism is a terrible thing. Square Enix's *Vagrant Story* on PSone was a startlingly fresh dungeon-crawling RPG, combining action and platforming elements with an innovative real-time combo-driven combat system. But for all of that inventiveness, alas, not a single sequel emerged.

Primal

A gorgeously cinematic goth netherworld and a sexy demonic female—sounds like an ideal game scenario, right? With two asymmetrically balanced characters (a brawling female and a puzzle-solving gargoyle), this PS2 title packed in exploring, problem solving, and shape-shifting combat. It was smart, clever, and beautiful...and it totally failed to click with gamers.

XIII

When Ubisoft's shooter hit PS2, its comic book visuals made an impact—complete with garish on-screen text bubbles shouting "BAAOOOM!" But alas those brilliantly quirky looks couldn't garner enough sales to justify a return—not even with voice work from David Duchovny and Adam West. It turns out superstitious types were right after all, then: 13 *is* unlucky.

Haven: Call of the King

This was a decent but insanely ambitious PS2 attempt to combine platforming, adventuring, racing, shooting, and space-based malarkey. Developer Traveller's Tales (of *LEGO Star Wars* fame) wanted *Haven* to be the new *Ratchet & Clank,* but the game tanked, leaving its star tied to a rock in a cliffhanger ending and waiting for a sequel that never came.

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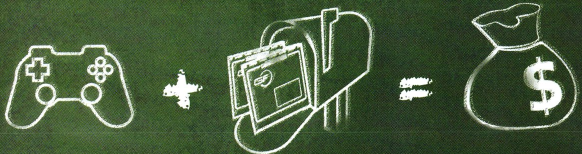

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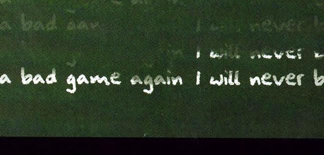
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ASSASSIN'S CREED BROTHERHOOD
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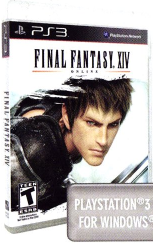
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